ROBERT THE ROUNDHEAD

BY

ARENCE STRATTON

ITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

HENRY C. PITZ

DISCARD

ROBERT THE ROUNDHEAD

By

CLARENCE STRATTON

ROBERT THE ROUNDHEAD

PAUL OF FRANCE

HARBOR PIRATES

ON THE MARGINS OF OLD BOOKS
(translated from the French)

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"IN THE THREATENING LIGHT OF THE DARKENING STORMY SKY IT WAS A THRILLING SIGHT"

Page 85

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BY

CLARENCE STRATTON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY HENRY C. PITZ

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ROBERT THE ROUNDHEAD

CHAPTER ONE

ON THE NORTH SEA

For a year or more now Robert Rennie had been away from his home in the quiet little village of north-east England. Off to the east of this district the never-quiet water had called to him, and after years of pleading with his father and mother he had won their reluctant consent to go to sea "for as long as he could stand it," as his father had put it.

The roving instinct was strong in the lad and the coasts of Holland, Denmark, Sweden, and France had

held him entranced with their wonders, so unlike all he had ever known in his quiet boyhood at home. For more than a year, then, he had coasted north and south along these fascinating countries, quickly picking up enough of the slow Dutch speech—extremely useful to a ship boy hoping to become a full able-bodied seaman—to make captains to whom he applied for places in their ships, ask whether he was from Holland or England. But even an adventurous lad in his middle teens does think of his home at times, so Robert decided to take service on a boat loading for some English port and surprise the little family with his yarns of strange places and rough men.

The port of Rotterdam was packed in this summer of the 1640's with so many craft that Robert had no trouble at all in finding a ship to his taste—a long, low, well-rigged but weather-beaten hulk that certainly must be a rapid sailer—she drew so little water. And bound for England, although the boatswain who took him on reminded him with an air-filling oath that young scrubs had no business to know where their ships were bound for.

Robert had seen enough life in creaking timbers to know at once after this ship slipped away from her anchorage that there was something unusual about her. The *Providence* she was called; but there was nothing answering to the suggestion of her name in the behavior of her officers and crew, in the mys-

terious cargo she carried, and in the twenty-eight or thirty guns she mounted. Certainly down below decks there were no firkins of dried or fresh fish, no tubs of butter, no silks or other clothing stuffs from the far East, no raw or tanned hides from central Europe. Whatever she carried, the cargo was heavy and settled the hull deep in the water, allowing every stitch of sail to be stretched. The wind, after a little slow tacking to get clear of the harbor and its enclosing sand bar, was directly astern, and the long, strong rollers of the dark North Sea helped her leap toward the invisible low and curving shore of his native land.

On she sailed, though the wind tugged at the canvas until the masts sounded as though they would tear from their sockets and the chasing white waves smacked the sides with thunderous crashes and the spray swept the wet decks. Cursing little old Captain Strawn did not care a rap about his ship's condition;—more sail and more speed was all he wanted, as he swept the horizon continually with his sea-glass.

Robert had found a foothold from which he could watch the captain. He saw the old man suddenly stop in the steady turn of his head and fix his gaze on the southeast rim of the heaving water. Then there were commands; the seamen tugged at a rope here, loosened a cable there; pulled and pushed, sweated and cursed, chanted and grunted, until the yards gave, and the *Providence* dashed across the

white caps, her bow turned to the northwest. And Robert knew that they were going to be chased.

Not for a long time after that change in their course did he see the tall white sails of their pursuers. They were ships of England, he soon made out. Only English ships had those lines. Only English ships—he glowed with pride in his country—dared sail so close to a half-gale wind as those did.

But why should ships of England—and now he knew they were bristling men-of-war—be chasing the little *Providence,* which also flew the English flag? All sail on the three cruisers of the fleet and all sail on the little *Providence,* and all of them tore through the waves with ear-splitting groaning timbers and shrieking wind. Robert's pulses throbbed and his eyes danced at the thrill of the chase. How long could the gallant little *Providence* draw away from the majestic bloodhounds of the ocean? Not long. Even as he thought this, the towers of rounded sails straightened a little. They knew the *Providence* could be overtaken whenever they pleased to close the distance between them.

It was plain that they did not intend to overtake or capture the quarry. It would suit their purpose better to follow her into the English port, and there seize her or at least examine her and her cargo. And again Robert wondered about that freight, so carefully brought on board, so carefully packed, so securely covered.

ALL SAIL ON THE THREE CRUISERS OF THE FLEET AND ALL SAIL ON THE LITTLE "PROVIDENCE"

All night and all day the ships stood behind, the distance never growing less, until Robert turning his eyes to the west, was astonished to see how close his ship was to the English coast. There rose the dangerous shore lands, the long waving line broken here and there by the mouths of the broad rivers. On and on the *Providence* flew, leaping from the crest of one wave to the one before it. Old man Strawn hardly gave a backward glance to his pursuers now and a grim smile was over the lower part of his dog-like face.

If the English navy officers would insult him by not capturing him on the high seas, let them beware. He still knew a trick worth three or four of theirs. And into the wide mouth of a river the *Providence* bounded.

"The Humber, by all that's holy!" a bent old mariner exclaimed.

"Then we're for Hull," another answered.

"That's splendid," Rob broke in, "that's not far from my home."

"Expect to see home?"

"Just give me a chance!" Robert crowed.

"More like Wappin Wharf or a jail," and the seaman nodded toward the three fleet pursuers who had also steered toward the river mouth. "They've got us bottled up here like a fish in a net."

That sobered Rob. Why Wappin Wharf? He

knew that was where pirates were swung from the gallows; and why a jail?

"You're never gone till you can't feel the rope around your throat or until you can't taste the salt water drowning you," the second seaman hopefully remarked. "But them craft do be pretty, even though they may be trying to dump me overboard to feed fishes."

Robert, too, stood in admiration of the beautiful vessels as they ranged themselves in single file to sail up the river behind the trapped *Providence*. Trapped she surely was. Up the stream was the populous town of Hull; before them the channel was narrowing; on both sides the shores were closing in; and behind, moving slowly but surely, the three ships of the line. Robert's neck turned goosefleshy. Gallows and jail! He knew the sailors had been trying to frighten him, but he did not want to go to sea again, forced on a ship of the navy; he wanted to go home. He wanted to make his own life, as he had so far. Why should anyone interfere with his plans? He had heard his father talk about the rights of the free-born Englishman and his resentment rose at any possible alteration of plans he had made for himself. Yet dream as he would, whenever he cast his glance astern, he saw those beautiful ships relentlessly following in the wake of the *Providence*. For miles and miles!

Then Strawn lowered his glass from the northern

shore and issued a few orders. Down and down went the helmsman's hands as he put the wheel hard over; here and there blocks and tackle screeched and the ropes ran smoking over the pulleys and the little *Providence,* shaking her tail saucily in the noses of the dignified men-of-war, glided rapidly and neatly into the mouth of a winding creek long before she came within sight of the city.

The leading pursuer was so close that Robert could hear the shouts of disappointment that broke from the men on her decks. So sure had they been of their prey that they had trained no gun upon her, and now no shot that could reach her would do any damage. Before the officers could recover from their rage and bring their ship about—with dangers of collision from those behind—the *Providence* had faded from their view, and they, too heavy and bulky to dare to turn a ship's length from the river channel, were left to go on to Hull or return to the open sea.

Rob was too far away to hear what old man Strawn said, but he could see the old salt-water dog slap his thigh in high glee, and he had no doubt that his rapidly working jaws were rolling out a long procession of ocean oaths in joy over the slip he had given the captains of swifter ships.

But why up a creek? Rob felt certain that there was no city on it, no wharves, no embarkment for unloading. Then what could be done with the cargo, so valuable if it had to be saved from even the ships of

the navy? The *Providence,* cut off by the closing banks from the full wind, was moving slower and slower, canvas shortened to help her round the twistings of the creek. How far could she go? Strawn was making up his mind about a landing place.

Taking advantage of an open stretch of country toward the east, across which the wind was still blowing at a strong clip, Strawn had the sturdy shallow craft turned straight for the opposite bank—a level stretch of sand and mud skirted by a dense growth of old trees. Not a house could be seen in any direction. The *Providence*—as if knowing that this was the end of her voyage—leaped toward the shore; the shallow water hissed past her sides; then her keel began to swish into the seaweed, then slide along the mud and crunch into the resisting sand. The masts bent and creaked, the ropes wailed in protest, the sails rushed down, and the hull with a great grunt came to a sudden stop that wrenched every bolt and joint in her planks, not more than fifty yards from the nearest trees, and old Strawn was so proud of his cleverness that almost dancing with joy he swung his weather-beaten hat round his head and sent it skimming into the water still churned by the course of his ship—that would likely never sail the seas again.

Hardly had the boat settled into her bed of ooze than a company of horsemen dashed from the woods and spurred toward the *Providence.* Rob should have been coiling ropes at the base of the main-mast,

but no sailor was doing his regular duty, so sure was every one of them that the ship was done. What good was it to escape from the ships to be captured on land? And these splendid horsemen were armed.

Captain Strawn leaned far down from his station on the high deck, saluted, and exchanged a few hurried words with the leader of the band—a dashing young gallant in large gray-feathered hat, dark brown riding suit, and soft leather boots to his thighs, his cream-colored deep lace collar and long curly blond hair gleaming above his bay horse. Like the flash of a sea gull he spurred along back to the trees as Captain Strawn turned to the waiting seamen in the low waist of the *Providence* and ordered the hatches uncovered and the cargo carried up and put over the side. Long timbers down which the cargo could be slid to the sloping dry shore were quickly laid; the hold was uncovered; and the first kegs began to roll out on the deck and toward the gunwale.

When Rob next looked at the shore he saw what must have been a hundred men working like ants to get the kegs, the long cases, the soft bundles over the ship's sides and up the shore to dozens of waiting carts and wagons of all shapes and sizes. The young horsemen were everywhere, and once when a large square case burst open, they dashed about it in feverish haste, and one of them threw his beautiful blue riding cloak over it, but not before Rob had caught a glimpse of some of its spilled contents.

Pistols!

For hours the crew toiled like galley slaves, but no signs of their work remained beside the ship, so quickly were the cases and bundles carted away. Horsemen continually darted off or rode up with reports. Rob had to pinch himself to believe that there in that lovely quiet country landscape so many things out of place should be disturbing its absolute peacefulness;—a beached ship, a gang of seamen, horsemen, hundreds of boxes and bundles of freight, and pistols!

Rob was nearly broken in two pieces when the last long case was deposited on the shore.

Old Strawn had come down into the waist and had a strong box at his side.

"Now, my men," he called in his sea lion voice, "line up for your pay. And an extra day's wages for getting the cargo out so soon."

They would have cheered, but he held his hand up in command of silence. A seaman would have as quickly answered a clap of thunder as speak when Strawn ordered silence.

When the men had received their money, instead of disappearing over the side as they always did in port, they hung about in groups, for they could see no place to go in this rural district.

The oldest sea dog on board waddled forward and pulled the gray wisp of hair on his forehead.

"Which direction be Hull, Sir?" he asked respectfully.

"Six miles yonder," and Strawn pointed.

"Could some of us borrow the yawl to row there?"

"Take it and welcome, but it's shorter cross country; and go to Burlington, it's nigh."

"Will the *Providence* sail no more?" he asked affectionately for his old ship.

"Not likely. Rot and break to pieces here."

"That's a pity, though she be almost as old as me," the old salt pronounced. "But, Sir," and he pulled his forelock again, "if I be so bold, what's the cargo for?" and then to show that he was not speaking ignorantly, he added, "Four hundred barrels of powder, upwards of two thousand pistols, more than eight hundred muskets, and seven cannon. We be glad to know," and he turned to the crew for support.

"Aye, aye," they muttered.

"Fair enough," Strawn agreed. "Every man for himself now. For the King is fighting the Parliament rebels."

CHAPTER TWO

UP A CREEK

In less time than it takes to tell it Rob had made a tight little roll of his few extra clothes, hidden his small wad of money about him, and had dropped over the side of the now useless *Providence* and scurried up the slope and through the bordering woods.

Almost as soon the ship had been deserted. Captain Strawn had strapped his box of valuables and papers to the saddle of a led nag and had ridden off most awkwardly with the Royalists. Some of the seamen had struck out along the creek for Burlington and other towns, while the rest had launched the small boats and had started the long slow pull to the bustling city of Hull.

Rob—country-bred and uncertain of how much danger lurked in a soldier-patrolled country—had a plan of his own. He wanted to get home, yes; but he was a curious growing lad and soldiers sounded as attractive to him now as ships had a few years before. Only one thing disturbed him—on which side should he decide to be? This indecision of his made him the more anxious to get home. He wanted to talk with his father. Maybe he ought to go to sea again and

help his father's and his own side there. Only which side had his father chosen? Which side should he choose? And the beautiful horses and fine clothes of the gentlemen riders who had met the *Providence* flashed before his eyes again. How splendid to be on the King's side and dress in that costume, and ride so spirited a horse.

He ran his hand along the back of his head and wondered how long it would take him to let his hair grow. Would it be curly? Then he called himself a fool. What was he dreaming of? He could not be a horseman, he, an unknown country boy who had been to sea a few years. Silly! But it was pleasant to dream such dreams as he stood at the far edge of the woods and gazed directly into the orange circle of the setting sun from which long crimson streamers spread to north and south across the evening sky.

Then he shook himself with a grunt. He had sweated and toiled all day long, but the evening was cool, the country beautiful, and if he walked straight into the west he might still reach an inn before total darkness set in. He hitched up his breeches and plunged into the tall grass that lay before him. How sweet it smelled after the tang of salt water and the pitch and water-soaked timbers of the hull of the *Providence!* Far behind him among the trees a whip-poorwill called for his sympathy and far above his head the martins were darting about with their sharp cries.

He had never thought much of it before, but England was a beautiful land. Beautiful enough to fight and die for? He was not so sure. Beautiful enough

to fight for, yes. But to die for? He put that thought aside and plucked a long-stemmed daisy to swing about as he trudged along.

"Not all men who fight get killed," he said aloud to a clump of oaks he was passing. "And besides," he went on in a lower tone, "I know enough Dutch to

become a Hollander, and they are the best sailors in the world."

He shut his mouth tight. That remark sounded like disloyalty to his native land. The more he watched the changing colors and views of the evening the more he felt that he loved the land as he had never loved it before and it was *his* land.

It was a glorious night; so beautiful that he loitered once or twice to gaze about him to drink in all the loveliness. Twice across his mind flashed the thought that it would be a pleasant experience to find a comfortable spot among the trees and sleep on the ground. Cold? He had worked through freezing nights on the sloppy decks of tossing ships drenched by spray and heavy water. Uncomfortable? He could tumble into a corner of a ship's hold and sleep for hours on a coil of rope. Dangerous? And there he paused.

There was fighting in the land, and evidently near by, else why had the powder and guns been put down in that creek by the *Providence?*

And he had money on his body. He felt certain he could defend that against all attacks. He drew himself up to his full height, straightened his right arm, and doubled up his fist. It satisfied him; he knew how hard a blow he could hit with it; and it made him feel safe anywhere. With fighting going on, he might need that money. He began to look about for a bed of leaves.

But for the last few years he had been a sailor. Who ever heard of a sailor keeping his pay for any length of time at all? The search for the leaves was given over. A picture of a comfortable chimney corner in a wayside inn with a mug and a smoking hot dish of smelly food floated before Rob's eyes and on he plunged in the westward direction of Hull. Long before he could distinguish the shapes of any buildings a tiny light led his steps to the low inn at the eastern end of a straggling village set along the two sides of a curving highway.

During the last half hour of his tramp, Rob had done some planning. As an Englishman he might be walking into trouble. Suppose he met only Parliament men? Was he to announce that he was of their party? Suppose, on the contrary, he met only King's men—as was the more likely. He remembered those attractive figures on horseback—how well they bore themselves, how easily they managed their steeds.

How could you tell from looking at a man on which side of the war he was? On which side would the keeper of the inn be—or more important still, on which side would his wife be?

Rob glanced down at his swaying legs and body against the tan dirt of the road. His clothes could not be mistaken—he was a sailor. He had it! A Dutch sailor wrecked on the coast to the north and now looking for a ship to take him back to Holland. The Dutch talk but little. He could easily manage

it with a few *Mynheers* and broken English. In addition, if he kept his mouth shut he could keep his eyes and ears open the wider.

He entered the stable yard and advanced to the low entry leading to the kitchen. The brilliant light of the blazing fire opposite the doorway made him blink for a second; then drawing himself to his full height he stalked majestically into the kitchen itself. At his entrance the three occupants turned their eyes upon him attentively, but when they saw that he was a sailor and a foreign one at that they found little of interest about him. True, the innkeeper did point to a short bench near the fire, but then he turned again to the wandering tinker who was still examining his last patch in a saucepan and left the newcomer to his short fat wife.

CHAPTER THREE

THE KING'S PROPERTY

DUTCH seamen were no novelty in this district and the hostess knew as much of the language as her business made necessary. As Rob sipped his ale and crunched the fish in his stew or pulled his bread to pieces and sopped the crusts in the gravy, he listened to the measured tones of the two men, who puffed and spit more than they talked.

"This saucepan'll do now till I come again," piped the tinker in a high voice as he held the vessel between the host's eyes and the fire.

The latter gazed at it stolidly for a time trying to see light where the hole had been filled. Then he blew a strong puff of smoke against it to see if it would go through. Satisfied, he waved the pan for his wife to replace on its nail against the wall.

"Looks sound again," he grudgingly admitted, turning his wide eyes on Rob. The youth finished two pieces of bread before the man spoke.

"You looking for boat?" he asked.

Rob deliberately took a long swig of ale, wiped his mouth with the back of his left hand, set the mug down, beckoned the wife to fill it again, and then looked at his questioner, nodded his head twice, and uttered:

"Ya. Find ship."

Silence settled down on them again.

The tinker could be quiet but his eyes and hands seemed never still. His gaze darted from the fire to the innkeeper's face, to the squat hostess, to Rob's empty plate, to his moving jaws, to the cooking utensils on shelves, racks, rafters, hooks, and nails, and his fingers went restlessly through his scraggly hair, over his long sharp nose, around his chin, inside the neck of his shirt, along his thighs, about his knees, and then rearranged the tools of his trade that lay

THE LATTER GAZED AT IT STOLIDLY FOR AWHILE, TRYING TO SEE LIGHT WHERE THE HOLE HAD BEEN FILLED

on the bench beside him. At last, he too, ventured to address a remark at the newcomer, although by the time he got it out, his eyes had looked in a dozen other directions.

"Big city—Hull."

Rob nodded.

"Much ship," was all he said.

The tinker and the innkeeper exchanged glances. Rob was at a loss to know whether their looks said more than their spoken words. He stretched his heavy boots towards the fireplace. The innkeeper broke the silence next.

"Won't be much shipping leaving Hull for a few days, I swear."

Rob, to whom the observation seemed to be directed, widened his eyes and turned a vacant stare at the speaker.

"Understand?" The tinker raised his squeaky pipe to a higher pitch.

Rob nodded and spread out his hands.

"Vhy?" he slowly asked.

"Soldiers," the tinker informed him after an exchange of glances had chosen him to speak first.

Rob looked puzzled.

"King's men all over the countryside here," the innkeeper described a wide curve with his pipe.

Rob's puzzled expression became denser.

"Other side—Parliament men," the tinker added

after he had carefully placed all his tools on a strip of frayed leather.

The innkeeper felt that his companion was not making it very clear to the foreigner.

"See here," and he leaned forward. "You see; only you two guests here tonight."

He waited for that to sink in. It did.

"Vhy?" Rob asked for the second time.

"King's men all over the countryside," the innkeeper repeated more slowly than before.

Rob nodded. He had heard that once before.

"So all the King's men are going to Hull," the innkeeper leaned back triumphantly. He had concluded his task of enlightenment.

The tinker, however, felt that the explanation had been merely opened. In turn he leaned toward Rob.

"And all the Parliament men hereabout have scattered for their lives."

The host decided that this was putting the case for that side too strongly. He shook his head as vigorously as his slow movements permitted.

"Most of them in Hull," he announced.

"With Sir John Hotham," the tinker squeaked.

Rob gazed at both of them in turn. Should a Hollander be interested any further in the affairs of England? He might be, since he was in the country and Hull was a busy port. He spread out his hands.

"King take town?" he asked.

The glances that flashed this time between the

tinker and the host sparkled. Rob perceived at once that on the answer to this question they differed.

"I say yes," the innkeeper decided quickly—for him.

"And I say no," the tinker was almost as prompt.

Then they glared. If they had not been patron and customer anything might have happened. Just a few moments before Rob's arrival they had contradicted each other until the host was ready to rap the tinker over the head with his pipe and the tinker was quite ready to do the same thing to the host with the latter's own saucepan. Only the common sense of the innkeeper's squat wife had kept the peace. At this reopening of hostilities she made a sign to her husband. He knocked the ashes from his pipe and stumped into the yard to look at the weather. At this pointed hint for going to bed the tinker furiously rolled up his work kit and tied the leather thong around it.

Rob had rolled to his feet at the first show of the men's anger and the landlady, turning to him, showed him the ladder up to the loft above the stable. There he sank into hay almost as deep as the North Sea.

But as he closed his eyes he muttered to himself:

"I must be in Hull early in the morning."

CHAPTER FOUR

THE KING AT HULL

THE city of Hull was, next to York, the most important city in the northeast district of England. When the rising quarrel between King Charles and his Parliament had been changing from politeness in words to firmness in action the leaders of the Commonwealth Party had offered the post of Governor of Hull to Sir John Hotham, who had accepted it, even though he was well acquainted with the King and desired to serve him as well as he was able. He never dreamed for an instant that the quarrel would pass from letters and speeches to soldiers and camps

or he would have refused the Parliament's appointment at once.

On the same day that the gallant little *Providence* saved her precious cargo for the King's men by sacrificing herself on the shores of the creek, the King, being at York, had sent his second son—the Duke of York—and a few gentlemen to visit the town of Hull. No one, since King Charles kept his own counsel, thought this visit anything more than a pleasure ride for the young lad. The last person to suspect the visit of the young lad's party was more than a social call was the governor, old Sir John Hotham himself. So he received and entertained them with all that honor and civility due to their rank and that aroused by his delight at the royal graciousness. So at nightfall they had departed with many compliments and returned to the King at York.

The next morning the King early took horse from York and with some two hundred of his courtiers and some hundred gentlemen of the country near by rode from the stately city of York to its neighbor next in size. About a mile from Hull the Royal Party stopped, and the King, summoning a courier, bade him ride to the governor to let him know that the King would that day dine with him.

When Sir John Hotham received that message he was strangely surprised. He had a timid disposition and liked to think things over for a long time before he made any decision, in spite of the fact that he

seemed to have everything any man could desire—old family, rank, spacious estates, large income, the confidence of the Commonwealth Party, and the respect of the King's followers. Yet the governor was cast into sudden worry, for he knew well what every person in the nation knew, that stored in Hull was the largest supply of arms and ammunition in the entire kingdom, greater than the one in the Tower of London itself. To keep that store of war material he had been appointed by the Parliament, yet here already was the King outside the City. What could the coming of His Majesty mean? Would the King demand that the powder and arms be delivered to him? Everyone in Hull knew by now of the *Providence* adventure of the day before. And if the King's party had weapons and ammunition, on whom would they use them?

Is it any wonder that the governor passed his hand nervously over his thinning white hair and ran it through his long wide beard?

There was little time, but he summoned the town officials under him and asked their advice. Then he issued orders.

It was just at this time that Rob, trudging from Hedon and circling Hull to approach it from the land side, saw in the distance the waiting horsemen of the King's party. The lad's eyes were forced wide open at the imposing array of the horsemen in all their fine trappings. At that distance the large group

seemed a waving sea composed of all colors—the horses, the costumes, the laces and gold and jewels, the broad trimmed hats, and the tossing plumes of all shades the universe could provide.

Rob's first impulse was to turn his steps toward them, but he knew they must be bound for the city, so he hurried thither, hoping that he would arrive as soon as they—if they started—and so see them at close range. He had almost gained the nearest gate just beyond a narrow deep ditch when he heard the tread of hundreds of horses behind him. The flashing cavalcade was coming slowly along the road, slowly, to make as little dust as possible to avoid soiling His Majesty's clothes and dimming his sight.

Rob watched the swing of the horses by which the King, riding until now at the head of the troop, was placed in the rear, so that his entrance into the city might be the more impressive. The first riders were almost opposite where he stood with other watchers in the bordering field when he saw a sudden commotion among the courtiers and heard a murmur of astonishment.

There was a grating noise behind him. Then he perceived what made it.

Slowly but surely the drawbridge across the ditch raised its end into the air until it rested flat against the arch above the gateway. Then rapidly the two ponderous studded gates swung inward and the gateway was shut. He heard the massive bars drop into

the sockets. Then all was still. Around the walls of the city the same noises followed.

The city of Hull was shut against its King!

Amazement and anger were on the face of every rider. The foremost parted and the King, flushed but forcing himself to be calm, rode forward at a walk. He drew his horse up.

On the wall above the barred gate and raised drawbridge appeared the anxious face of the governor who covered his confusion with a deep bow.

"Your Majesty—," he began.

"Sir John Hotham," the King interrupted him in a clear steady tone, "there must be some strange error. I come to visit this, my town of Hull. Ignorant men have drawn this bridge and barred this gate," he pretended not to notice that the same had been done to the next gate and bridge several hundred yards to his right. But he did sweep his eyes along the wall. What he saw stung him to the quick, but being a King, he had to control his anger. "And there be men," he forced himself not to call them men-at-arms, "upon the wall."

"Your Majesty," resumed the governor, "no man of your Kingdom would serve you better than I would. Your Majesty knows that."

The King waved him to spare the protestations and get on with his speech.

"I own my duty to Your Majesty's orders—"

"Will the fellow never have done?" the King muttered to the nearest of his companions.

"And am sensible of all Your Majesty's favors—"

"And come to the point," finished King Charles.

"Sword point I'd furnish him," answered the boyish Duke of York.

"Hush, Son," the King replied, turning his face again up to the still-speaking governor. "Your pledges of duty please us, Sir John, and if you will have this mistake corrected at once, we shall overlook the error, and ask no condemnation or punishment for the man responsible."

He turned to his companions and was about to nod that they form their lines again, but hearing no sound of loosened gates or drawbridge chains he wheeled toward the city.

Nothing had changed, and the governor stood more resolute and confident than before.

Angry exclamations broke from the indignant riders and horses stamped impatiently. The King raised a silencing hand.

The small knot of watchers with Rob on their flank had slowly slipped nearer and could hear all that was said. They were more amazed at the boldness of the governor than awed at the presence of so large a Court party and the figure of the King himself. King Charles was pleasing-looking rather than forceful. Rob knew many a sea captain who inspired more fearful respect on the deck of a small vessel than

did this monarch of the Kingdoms of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. He might have smiled at the smallness of the whole affair, if the situation in which the King found himself had not aroused in his heart a sense of pity for the powerlessness of even a great title. The King! And yet he stood outside the gate of a city and could not get in.

Rob also noticed that fine words could "butter no parsnips," as his father so often slyly remarked.

"Your Majesty will not lay it up against me," the governor was now making himself heard once more, "but I dare not open the gates."

"Dare not!" exclaimed the King.

"Dare not," the governor emphasized the words. "For I am entrusted by the Parliament."

The King's horse jumped. Had the King spurred him and thus hidden an angry sally of his own?

"I believe, Sir John, you have no order from the Parliament to shut the gates against your King, and to keep your King from this city."

"Your Majesty, your train is so great—hundreds of horsemen, that if it were admitted into this city, I should not be able to give a good account of the town."

"Now," said Rob to himself, "what does he mean by that? These horsemen would capture the place? Or the citizens would set on them? Why can't people speak out what they mean?"

But the King was speaking again.

"Then since you fear that the townspeople will look with anger on my men—"

"The governor didn't say that," Rob thought quickly.

"For the sake of quiet I shall enter with twenty horsemen only, while the rest stay without."

"Like all your acts, Your Majesty, that is generous, but that likewise, I regret that I dare not accept."

If the governor could see the countenances of the King's followers after this refusal he knew that there was danger in letting them within the walls—danger most of all to himself. Never in their lives had these gentlemen heard a subject—how great soever—so address his sovereign. A quick thrust and short shrift for him would be too kind, their expressions indicated.

The King's patience was not exhausted yet. Rob thought of how a ship captain would have settled such disobedience. A few words and a pistol shot. Or if the skipper had no weapon, a piece of timber could stretch a sailor senseless along the deck. And once Rob had seen an angered Holland master pick a seaman up bodily and hurl him into the ocean to sink or swim. Yet here the King of England stood bandying words with an unarmed man on a city wall.

A venerable-looking old man with dried yellow skin had edged his horse close to His Majesty's and spoke a few words to the King in a low tone. Then he let his horse slide back into the crowd. His Majesty had nodded.

"Then, Sir John, this only I ask: that you will come down and converse with me here. And I give you my word as King for your own safety while you are with me. And you shall have full liberty to return."

The courtiers leaned over their horses' necks to catch the governor's reply.

"Your Majesty is gracious and for myself I should be honored beyond my deserts to talk with you. But in this also I beg Your Majesty to excuse me."

The courtiers straightened in their saddles as though the King would next order them to do something. But the royal patience was not yet exhausted.

"Sir John, this act of yours is without parallel in my knowledge. You must know that it is likely to produce some notable effect. It is not possible that I should sit down quietly under such an indignity."

He paused.

"I regret," the governor remarked, "that I can say and do no more."

The King signed that his men remain where they were, but he rode forward several paces nearer the walls. Then he called in a loud, clear voice.

"Then you will have me proclaim you a traitor and force me to proceed against you as a traitor. This disobedience of yours is like to bring many miseries upon this kingdom of England, all of which may be prevented if you would perform the duty of a subject. Think, I warn you, soberly on this and

avoid the beginning of all those calamities that will be upon your conscience."

The governor scrambled to the top of the rampart above the wall.

"The world is my witness," he cried, "that I must obey the trust rested in me by Parliament." Then he fell upon his knees and stretched out his arms to the King. "May God bring confusion on me if I be not a loyal and faithful subject to Your Majesty. Yet I dare not let you enter this city."

The King beckoned to one of his Court attendants.

The officer rode to a position just behind the King. From his garb Rob guessed he must be a herald. In a loud voice he solemnly proclaimed Sir John Hotham a traitor. Then he wheeled and rode to the rear while murmurs of approval rose from the courtiers.

The governor, at the first word from the herald, had risen resolutely to his feet and clapped his hat upon his head. Before the King could turn his horse away, Sir John called out boldly:

"No traitor am I, as you must well know, but the Governor of Hull is under orders from the nation's Parliament to keep this city and the arms and ammunition it contains safe from anyone who comes to take them from me, yes, even if it be the King himself, and so do I intend to do."

Then he stood, a noble figure, alone on the ramparts of his charge, while the King and all his gor-

geously garbed companions, outwitted and out-talked, had to make the best of their ride back to York.

"So that's the way wars begin!" said Rob to his nearest neighbor as the cavalcade disappeared down the high road from the city, and the town gates opened, and the drawbridges fell.

CHAPTER FIVE

SAILOR AND BUTCHER BOY

THE little village of Eveham had begun that day as quietly as it did all the long warm days of the mild English summer. The natives had scanned the lazily floating pillowy white clouds and had slowly wondered whether the long spell of dry weather—so good for getting in a large crop of fragrant hay—would be terminated that afternoon by thunder in the far-away south and a sudden downpour. The women had hustled about their cows and pigs and chickens, cackling almost as continuously and excitedly as the fowls

themselves, to the amusement of the more reserved solid men of their households.

The girls had hurried through their house and garden chores with one eye on the weather and hoped they could steal away at some time in the afternoon to loiter through the meadows and woods. The tots dragged their rag and wooden dolls through the grass and propped them up beside the hedgerows. And whenever enough boys could evade the parental eye and get beyond range of the parental call, exciting games of tip-cat were started in the widest stretch of the village street.

The players changed frequently as boy after boy was chased back to his unwelcome task by the swishing of a long switch or led bawling away by his smarting ear or elbow.

As Rob, all that long afternoon, drew nearer and nearer to the town he knew as home, he could picture, in his mind's eye, the familiar life of the sleepy inhabitants. He recalled the experiences and games he had indulged in, wondered if all the boys were as tall and strong as he was now, looked forward to the sensation he was going to create with his yarns of the sea, and then sobered a little as he realized that he would be the first to report to them the stirring events at Hull—the King of the land turned away from the closed gates of one of his own cities.

The thought of that yarn to spin would make Rob quicken his steps until the lure of some orchard, the

call of some brook would induce him to loiter again. He knew he was getting closer to home. The broken low lines of piled stones, supposed to keep sheep from straying too far, were giving place to hedgerows, wild and thorny at first, more and more regular and trimmed later on. Across the wilder land he had struck boldly; now he was more disposed to respect property rights and to follow the road, or to take only those short-cuts and paths that were plainly marked.

There in the dim distance was the spire of the little old village church. Rob's back involuntarily winced as he remembered the aches he had suffered sitting in the high-backed pews listening—or rather trying not to listen—to the long-winded sermons to which Prue and he had been dragged when they would much rather have returned thanks for the pleasure of living by being in the meadows and orchards. Yet the spire seemed shorter than he had thought it was. He drew himself up to his full height. He was getting to be almost a man now.

Wouldn't he astonish the quiet folk with his tale of having been near the King?

That anticipated pleasure was—boy-like—stronger in his mind than the desire to see his sister, his father, and his mother. Not far now. Around that turn, through the clump of old trees to the left, down a steep patch, a few jumps from stone to stone in the creek, a wet foot or two, up the gravel bank beyond,

through the high grass of the meadow—if the hay had not yet been cut; over a slight rise, over a stone wall into the main road again, and the houses would begin. Had many new ones been built? Certainly not. People did not stay in Eveham if they could possibly go anywhere else. Why, even he had gone as far away as he could!

There! A wood thrush was calling with his beautiful flute. Rob walked slowly through the trees. What a marvelous note that bird could make!

But Rob's entry into his native hamlet was destined to be very different from what he was so blissfully enjoying in advance as he trudged innocently through that clump of trees listening to the unreal song of the invisible wood thrush.

Near the middle of that afternoon the few men near the main road had been startled by the sound of a horse's hoofs. Some certain news of the King's hurried march north from his palaces near London had reached this out-of-the-way place. All who heard turned their eyes in its direction or hastened toward the road to see the rider. Though relieved, they were slightly disappointed to see only a bony nag, making more clatter than speed, backed by a bumping rider dressed as quietly as any of their own number. Some of them easily recognized him and went back to their work.

"Tom Harrison!" was all they grunted.

Tom Harrison himself, however, thought he was of

more importance than they did and on this day he had a thrilling story to tell. Before the low doorway of his father's dark butcher shop he pulled up noisily and slipped to the ground. Tip-cat was deserted and with shouts of delighted welcome the boys and girls, and several men and women, hastened to gather round the perspiring rider.

"Oh, Paw! Oh, Maw!" Tom Harrison bawled into the house. "Here, hold my horse," he ordered the nearest lad who sprang to carry out the honoring request.

Tom stood carelessly beside his mount, letting himself be stared at and admired.

"How goes the writing, Tom?" asked a grinning boy whose own knuckles had smarted under the master's rule until he had decided that tending pigs did not require flourishes made on paper with a goose quill.

"Writing?" Harrison scowled. "You mean the law, I take it?"

There were impressed murmurs. So the clerk had something to do with the law!

"Getting up in the world," someone else complimented him. "Better clothes than you ever knew here at Eveham."

It was true. The garb was the quiet one of the small-town clerk to the lawyer, but the material was good and the garments did fit Tom's tall body.

"Writing-master?" sputtered one of the girls to

whom another had been whispering. "Why, Tom Harrison can write better than any master this town ever had."

"I think I do," Tom agreed, "and if I have time I'll be glad to show you. Oh, Maw! Oh, Paw!" he yelled again. As he heard them approaching, Tom Harrison looked more important and prepared to hurl his news at the assembled group.

"Glad to see you, Maw. Compliments, Paw." He paused impressively. "Are you prepared for war in these parts, people?" The terrified exclamations and cries flattered him. "Seen any of the King's men riding about here?"

There were decided negatives.

"Well, you will," Harrison went on. "And dirty Parliament men, too, no doubt. Scores of them!"

"War!" his terrified mother had recovered her speech. "Why war? What is it, Tom? King's men! Dirty Parliament men!"

"Listen to me," Tom's voice rose above her as the group around him attracted other villagers. "Nothing can prevent fighting now. Today—I was at Hull—I saw the Parliament governor shut the city gates against His Majesty." Tom reverently removed his hat.

"Against the King!"

"What a terrible thing to do!"

"Then our cows and pigs won't be safe!"

"You were shut inside the city?"

"Yes. But though the King rode away with all his gentlemen, the governor had to open the gates as soon as he was gone, and so I rode here to give you the news. The King was a match for them in spite of their vile treatment of him."

"Did he get into the city?" a seeker after facts inquired.

"He hadn't when I left. But have no fear, he will." And Tom launched into a highly exciting account of the courage and behavior of the King and the fear and timidity of the governor when, after the King had departed for York, he realized the villainy of his reckless act. In Tom's narrative, the King had all the better of the encounter. And over and over again to successive groups that afternoon, Tom Harrison repeated his thrilling story, always remembering fresh details at every recital.

And that was why Rob's first appearance in his native town was so different from all he had anticipated.

As he made his way from the country road into the village street he saw a knot of people gathered before the butcher's house. Good! He could tell a large number his tale at once. But as he drew nearer he could see that they were all listening attentively to the fluent Tom Harrison. Rob drew near quietly.

"And just then," Tom went on, "the King could easily have killed the governor on the wall, but he is so generous that he just aimed his pistol far above

Sir John's head to show him what he could do if he had the mind—"

"That's not so," Rob broke out in spite of himself, "the King had no pistol and fired no shot."

The group started back in amazement.

"Rob Rennie!" several exclaimed.

The two boys faced each other. Tom Harrison did not show the slightest change in his face. His lawyer master had told him that a good lawyer never did. Rob's face was red with anger and his eyes were blazing at the other's false version of the story he had taken so much delight in being able to tell himself. He felt, too, that his outburst had drawn him in deeper than he wanted to be. What else Tom had told he did not know, but he felt that the listeners approved of Tom's report.

"Royalists!" he thought scornfully.

"You were in Hull today?" he challenged Tom.

"Of course I was. How else would I know what went on?" Tom answered. Then he asked pointedly, "Were *you* in Hull?"

"No," admitted Rob slowly.

"Well, then," and Harrison smiled calmly, while the others drew in closer about Rob to force him to retreat.

"You were in Hull?" Rob asked Harrison.

"Inside the city, on affairs, all day until I started here." Harrison was triumphant.

"Then you don't know what you're talking about,"

Rob told him clearly. "And what you've told these people is false—a pack of lies."

Still Tom's face showed no anger. Contradiction and opposition were all in the day's work for a lawyer, and Harrison considered himself already a practicing member of that profession, although he did little more than dust books and tables, arrange papers, and put books in their proper places.

Rob was provoked and growing angrier every moment. His story spoiled, his facts flatly denied, the gaping crowd visibly turned against him; all these were enough to irritate any ordinary lad, and Rob was a sailor. Usually rather silent, Rob had to show that he knew what he was talking about.

"There was no pistol shot," Rob repeated in a louder tone as he stepped closer to Tom Harrison. The latter fell back half a pace, but feeling behind him the bodies of his earlier listeners he stood still.

Rob poured out his tale—omitting only the end of his ship the *Providence* and the removal of the powder and arms—dwelling mostly on his nearness to the King's party and the distinctness with which he had heard every word spoken by the governor on the wall above the gate. The bystanders dropped their lower jaws and raised their eyebrows and gazed speechless at the teller. He had seen the King and his followers; he had heard him speak; he had seen the governor defy his monarch. The influence of Rob over the crowd was growing stronger every

minute, though he spoke directly to Harrison, taking no notice of the effect his words were producing on others.

Harrison could not pretend that he was not hearing every word. As the account proceeded a sneer spread from his eyes and covered his entire face.

"And then the King's men turned their horses and rode away," Rob concluded, "and so I started on my way here."

The long-drawn intaking of breath was the best applause he could have yearned for, but it was completely soured for him by the evident contempt of Harrison. There was a tense pause while all eyes were fixed expectantly on the butcher's successful son. Clearly he must do something to justify his own story and to assert his superiority not only over Rob but over all the interested spectators. He coolly measured Rob from head to foot.

"That's a likely story," he commented, "only," he went on, "you can't expect us to believe it."

He turned aside as if so far as he was concerned the conversation was ended.

Rob was tanned but a deeper flush raced over his face and neck. Harrison had taken only one step when Rob sprang after him and seizing him by his right shoulder swung him around to face the group.

"You mean I'm lying?" Rob demanded.

Harrison had no intention of retreating from his position. He was slightly older than Rob, taller,

more active looking. In his rough sailor's garb Rob seemed strong and stocky but heavy and awkward. Harrison had made his way through his youth and teens by pluck and quickness of both mind and body, and when he had been apprenticed to the lawyer in a near-by city he had been forced to fight with nearly all the other clerks in that office and neighboring ones. City chaps had tried to lord it over him and he had been agile enough to hold his own and win their respect.

At exactly this moment Rob, who had fought him often in early years, remembered Harrison's long reach and his wiry legs with which he could hold off an antagonist, tiring him until some advantage was shown.

"Take that back!" he commanded Harrison.

"Never!"

There was a cheer from the spectators. At any rate there was no sign of weakening on either side.

Before Harrison could jump aside Rob had sprung at him, possessed with only one desire—to shake him by the neck until he would take back what he had just said. He clutched Harrison's neck, but before he could exert any pressure, the taller boy was tearing at his fingers and working his bent knee up against Rob's body. Then with a sudden effort Harrison loosened Rob's fingers from his throat and straightened his leg. Rob stumbled back several paces before he could recover his balance. Then he clenched his

fists, drew a long breath, and advanced warily and slowly to beat his enemy into subjection. But he never landed a single blow.

Rob had taken only one step forward when Harrison spoke spitefully.

"Certainly you're lying. You're no better than that vile sister of yours."

Rob looked as though he had been struck over the head with a heavy cudgel. All the blood left his face. His feet grew heavy as lead. The strength flowed out of his arms. Unfair as the blow was, Harrison had scored. Rob's lips moved appealingly as he turned to the boys with whom he had grown up. The only signs they made were like added blows. Their faces were blank, or showed pity or aversion. Some of his boyhood friends moved away from him and toward Harrison.

Rob regained the use of his tongue.

"What does he mean?" he asked. "What does he mean?"

No one answered, and only a sense of uncomfortable knowledge showed on the faces. There was a burst of relieved voices as Mrs. Harrison darted into the road and led the triumphant Tom away, followed by all the chattering crowd.

And Rob—feeling nothing, seeing nothing—blindly stumbled along the village street to the far end of the town and fell sobbing against his mother just inside the kitchen door.

CHAPTER SIX

PRUE'S CAVALIER

It was a long time before the strong manly-looking lad—who was in his nature still very much a boy—was calmed by the tender little woman who seemed so frail beside him. She comforted him as she had when as a baby he had scratched his leg or bumped his nose in a tumble. All his pent-up feelings of excitement, of joy at coming home, of resentment at the reception by his village companions, of rage against Tom Harrison found relief in this outburst of emotional storm.

As his mother sat beside him on the family settle near the fireplace his eyes roved fondly around the dark-walled, low-ceilinged room, resting pleased for a few seconds on the brilliant nodding blossoms outside the open-wide casement, smiling a little at the brightly polished pewter pans—his mother's pride, and darting toward the darker corners of the rest of the house, and gazing fearfully at the open rear doorway that gave on the kitchen garden.

In spite of all her devouring curiosity to hear of his travels and to know the reason for his torrent of gasps and sobs, the little woman, as the result of her experience with both husband and son, bit back all

her questions and sat quietly beside Rob, affectionately stroking the back of his hand or patting his shoulder. She knew that all she wished so keenly to know would come out later if not now. It was good to have her sturdy, steady son home again, if only for a few days, and she began to think fearfully of the vague rumors she had heard of troubles to the country, of quarrels between King and Parliament in London, of threats by wanderers, of riding bands of Royalists, of mournful predictions of soldiers that would march hither and yon, and of the report that everybody must decide for one side or the other.

Could this trouble just beginning have sent Rob home to her? Would it take him away from her again? Soon?

Her thoughts were interrupted by the first meaningful question from her boy.

"Where's Father?" he suddenly blurted out.

"In the lower meadow," she told him. Then as she saw an unexpressed wish in Rob's eyes, she went on mildly. "He'll not be in just yet, Rob; there's work to do down there, and he hasn't heard you're here. So you may take your time at getting your natural wits together and washing your eyes with cold water and being a huge man again."

Rob smiled at her understanding of his feelings.

"Of course I want to see Father soon," Rob went on.

"Of course you do, my boy, but I know you're a little relieved that he didn't see you as I did."

Rob nodded.

"Rob, you know your father's a strong, sober, stern man. But he loves his children none the less. Before I married him I was a careless, unthinking, almost wild lass, Rob; and at times I was in awe of him, but he's never been harsh to me, Rob, not when I was most like to provoke him with flightiness and silliness. Though stern, he's the best man I ever knew. And he loves all of us—and most of all his children—more than they'll ever guess, Rob."

Rob's terrible question rushed to his lips, but he set his teeth hard and swallowed it again. Not for long could he restrain himself from asking it. It was a worrying fact that his mother had not mentioned his sister. What was the frightening secret about Prue?

His mother hustled to get him a basin of water and a cloth. The process of bathing his face and hands and trying to smooth down his rebellious wavy brown hair kept both of them occupied until his father's stooped but powerful figure closed the kitchen doorway.

"Yes, Rob, as I'm alive!" he called out joyfully, clapping him on the shoulder, then holding his son at arm's length to examine him carefully. "Almost a man now, eh, my boy?"

"Look at his brown skin and feel his arms," his wife added fondly.

Rob was embarrassed at this family scrutiny of his points.

"Where's Prue?" he asked quickly to turn the talk away from him.

His father drew his hand from Rob's shoulder and stared at his wife. She mutely spread out her hands and turned away. Rob had never seen his father's face so clouded, never seen in his eyes such a look of bitterness, never heard such sharp reproof in his voice.

"Gone!" was all he muttered.

"Gone?" echoed Rob, looking from one to the other.

"Yes, gone," repeated his father. .

"Gone where?" persisted Rob.

His father waited as though giving his wife a chance to tell what her daughter had done, but she was sadly gazing through the doorway toward the woods on the surrounding hills.

"Gone off! Run away. The sly baggage."

"Oh, don't call her that," his wife pleaded.

"Sly baggage," the angry man repeated as though holding her somewhat responsible for Prue's actions. "Gone with a rascal; not one of her own kind."

"Who is he?" asked Rob.

"We're not certain," his mother put in hastily, before his father could speak or silence her.

"How could we be more certain?" he demanded, his ire rising. He turned to Rob, "With that young son over at the manor house—curses on the whole family of them—Roy Donald Chester."

"Oh, Father," his mother protested again. "We can't be absolutely certain of that. We only feel he must have—"

"Wasn't the family gone the day before she was? And didn't we hear from the people that the young Chester stayed one day longer than they did? Could anyone be found who had seen him the day after Prue left us? Don't we know she had fine hankerings after fine people? Didn't she fret to live here quietly with us? We're too plain for your sister, Rob. She was always dreaming of something better than I could give her."

"You were over-stern with her, Father," his wife began slowly, "all young girls at Prue's age dream great stories. You know even I did."

"I'm not saying you are to blame, Mother," her husband said kindly, "but it's from you likely that Prue got her notions of a better life. Well, this life has been good enough for all my fathers and their wives and it should be good enough for mine."

"But Prue is different, you see."

"Graceless daughter she was and graceless I'll think her still," the hurt father concluded.

"Tom Harrison said a vile thing about her," Rob told him.

"Yes. Who doesn't know of it?"

"But what have you learned since?"

"Pretty stories. Old Gaffer Warren knows a lot more than we can make him tell. Pretends to be losing more hearing as he grows older. Looks silly when we question him. But we have heard of meetings in those woods."

Rob's mother gave a start and turned her gaze from them as if she were watching Prue hurrying toward the trees.

"And presents we found after. Couldn't take them with her. Yet she had kept them hidden from us. Oh, sly she was! And we've even heard—"

"But we don't believe this story," his wife said quickly.

"Must have been true that last night. We've heard that after we thought her safe in bed she would slip out of the house for meetings with him. Oh," and the stern man's father feeling rose within him, "it almost broke my heart."

His wife moved silently to his side and placed her hand upon his arm consolingly.

"Tom Harrison called her vile," Rob wailed.

"I hope you knocked the words down his throat," his father exclaimed wrathfully.

"I didn't—then," his son returned hesitatingly, "but I will."

"Good!"

"Where did you see Tom Harrison?" his mother

asked. "I always thought he liked Prue. Was certain of it. But she cast her eyes higher."

"Too high," her husband reminded her.

"So Tom's doubly bitter. Pride's scratched," his mother went on.

Then Rob told them the story of his adventures from the time the little ship *Providence* sailed from Holland. They listened spellbound.

"But you came away without thrashing Tom Harrison within an inch of his life."

"I did," Rob admitted to his father. "But I'll do it yet, you'll see." Then to turn his father's remarks from his own deeds, Rob asked, "But didn't Prue leave any message?"

His father's brow darkened again.

"For your mother," was all he answered.

"But it was really for you," she reminded him, "and you have it now."

Still the old man sat stubbornly.

"May I see it?" Rob asked him.

Going to a chest beneath the corner closet, he drew out a small heavy box that contained the few family valuables, including the few books his father and mother had read in their younger days. Tenderly extracting a dark dumpy volume of dull sermons, he opened it carefully and gingerly drew from its pages a sheet of light brown paper which he offered his son without glancing at it himself. He had found it so

easily that Rob wondered whether he took it out often to gaze upon his daughter's farewell message.

"Mother, dear," the scribbled note began. "I am going away because I can be happier. Here's a kiss for you and one for Father. I'm sorry I'm such a burden to him. Don't let him worry. I love you both. Good-by.

"PRUE."

Rob returned it.

"She wrote to her mother." It was plain that Prue had wounded her father's pride even in her last words.

"But she talks most about you, Father," Rob told him brightly. "Let me see that paper again. Didn't she tear this out of one of her books?"

His mother and father nodded.

"But this is only half the page. Is the other half gone? Let me see the book."

From Prue's low-beamed room his mother quickly brought the little collection of moral stories. At the rear two whole blank pages were torn, yet the note he held in his hand was only half of one page.

"Did Prue leave word with anyone else?"

"We've never heard of any," his mother said as his father tenderly placed the note in his book and deposited the book in the chest, and pushed it back below the cupboard.

Rob wondered.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE TORN HALF PAGE

NEXT day the puzzling thought returned to Rob's mind. Why had Prue torn out two blank pages if she had intended to write on only one? The rest of the paper had not been found in her room the morning her flight had been discovered. What had happened to it? If she had cast it aside, her parents would certainly have come upon it when they searched for more evidences of her flight.

She had not gone off in confusion. Nothing in her little bedroom had been disturbed. She had taken nothing.

"Oh, that rogue Chester has enough money to load her down with anything she wants," her father had said bitterly.

"It's a comfort to know that she will not suffer for want of clothes. That's how I look at it," her mother had answered him.

"That's good of you, Mother," Rob had agreed with her. His father had cast an angered look at him, but it softened when he saw the confused and hurt expression on the boy's face.

"Did any of her friends know of anything?"

"Not much or they won't tell, at least. We didn't

pry too deep;—no sense in letting people say nasty things about your daughter. Especially when Tom Harrison made jokes about all of us, setting ourselves up as better than common folks around here. Taunted us with our poverty, we heard, too. Most of the girls seem envious of Prue's great love story, if I'm any judge. And if it turns out a tragedy, I don't think they'll much mind. I'd hate to have their pity, too. So we keep more than ever to ourselves, Rob."

Rob wandered about the house, the garden, and the three meadows. He looked with an absent mind at the chickens in which his mother took so much pride; the pigs that she pretended to like only when they were ready to sell or dressed for cooking; the idly chewing cows that were the greatest store of the modest family possessions. He strode across the grass regardless of the strip he trod down until his father chided him for his carelessness.

"Mayhap you can walk wherever you please on the deck of a ship," he wound up, "but you can't walk where you please on my property."

This reminded Rob of how the light-hearted Prue had suffered under such rebukes. She had been much more attracted by the looks of things than their use for food or profit. Blossoms to her were flowers to be employed as decorations; not to be treasured for the fruit they would bring later. And fruit was for her to eat; not to be picked and tenderly packed for sale or kept for fodder for the cattle and hogs.

Dresses should be pretty and worn every day; not kept only for Sunday service. Aprons and smocks were to be used as little as possible; only to keep bright clothes bright. Had she been allowed she would have danced every day, although her father frowned severely on such frivolity. With all his sternness, Prue was pert and reckless. Rob could recall a hundred things she could say and do with no punishment upon her saucy head; though for lesser irregularities he would be cuffed until his head swam.

The repression must have grown more burdensome to her as she shot up toward womanhood. He gazed round him. What did this little corner of old England offer to an active young boy or girl? He thanked his lucky stars he had won his father's consent to go to sea. His absence had made the family fortunes better and his small pay had relieved his father's worries at times.

Rob couldn't make his mind blame Prue very much. But he feared for what might happen; what might have happened to her already. All her trusting dreams of happiness might already be shattered; and her life might be a horror to her. If he could only learn something about her.

Down at the edge of the far field he came upon Gaffer Warren leaning over the low stone wall, sunning his curved broad back. Gaffer Warren had no grandchildren, in spite of his title. He had simply grown into the honorary title because he was so an-

cient and so fascinating to children. Everything a youngster liked Gaffer Warren could do, from making the stiff legs of a wooden doll move more easily to winning for a poor player at pitch penny.

Nobody knew whether Gaffer Warren was really deaf or not. He seemed only to miss hearing the remarks he did not wish to hear. Often he disturbed persons who depended on his deafness by hearing perfectly what they wanted him not to hear.

"Hy, Rob," he called, waving a paw that made Rob think of the flipper of some strange fish.

"Morning, Gaffer. Glad to see you."

"Needn't yell. I hear well enough of that side. I heard ye was to home."

"Well, what do you think of me?"

"Comin' on. Comin' on. Sailor's brawn, of course. But a leetle skinny about thy middle yet."

His grin showed his toothless gums in the red cavity of his boned and wrinkled face.

"I'll fill out when I'm older," Rob promised.

Gaffer Warren's face drew into seriousness again.

"I hope your sister Prue's having a gorgeous time," he said suddenly.

Rob was on the alert immediately. Did this old fellow know anything the other villagers did not? It would be just like the old man to delight in some secret information that could solve a mystery.

"You know the Chesters?" Rob asked. Instantly he realized he had made a mistake. The old man's face lost all its intelligence. He disregarded Rob's question totally. Perhaps he hadn't heard, for he had shifted his position again as Rob repeated it. His eyes had a far-away look as he stared up the meadow slope.

"Papers are tricksy things," was all he said.

"Can the old fellow's wits be going?" Rob thought to himself. There would be nothing strange in that. To Rob the hollowed and curved old figure on the other side of the wall appeared a hundred years old.

"Papers?" Rob exclaimed aloud.

"Aye. Papers. Tricksy things," Gaffer continued mumbling. "I've lost a many papers in my time. Some I just couldn't find where I'd put them for safe keeping. Some stole, like as not. Stole. Papers always make trouble." He fetched a deep sigh from the depths. "But people keep on wanting papers," he added brightly, bringing his eyes down to rest for a second on Rob. The sight of the boy brought some reality back to his mind. "Sailors don't have much to do with papers, I suppose. Good thing, that." He nodded his bird-like head repeatedly. "Keeps them out of mischief, belike."

"Oh, I'm in no trouble," Rob assured him. "Only Prue. If I could find out more about her. Do you know the Chesters over yonder?" He returned to his original question though he feared Gaffer's mind was still running on papers.

It was.

"Always papers. Always troubles. Now I hear the Parliament men have sent some papers for the King to sign. He will not sign papers. More troubles brewing, you mark my words."

And still mumbling, but taking no farewell of Rob, off he hastened along the path, his step still spry, even if his wits did go wool-gathering.

Rob watched him for a long time, his mind, too, on papers and the news the old man had repeated of the brewing trouble between Parliament and the King. As Rob turned aside from the wall, his eye

rested for a moment on the old stump at its far end, the old stump that had been the center of so many of the childhood games Prue and he had played together. He made his way to it slowly and brushed a few twigs and rotten leaves from its top and perched himself upon it. It was not an entirely comfortable seat. He remembered they had found that true long ago. Several slits in dresses and rips in trousers had been made by its splinters. No; as a carriage seat or throne it had not been eminently successful. It had served best as a letter box. When Prue and he had been proud of their ability to copy words and then write their own thoughts they had discovered they had nobody to write letters to. So they had written them to each other and deposited and collected them here.

Rob rose and idly poked among the leaves and twigs and moss still lying over and within the deepest and widest fissure in the stump. Suddenly he became more intent on what he was doing. Then he was certain there was something unusual about the leaves he was raking out. They were not old decayed ones, as they must have been had they lain there through all the years the stump had been neglected. They seemed to have been packed in by a human hand; not merely to have fallen there by chance.

Excitedly Rob was rapidly but observingly fingering every leaf. Deep in the hole he felt something soft to his touch. It felt like cloth. He drew the

IT WAS THE HALF OF THE PAGE THAT BORE PRUE'S NOTE TO HIS PARENTS

crumpled moist wad to the light and gingerly unwrapped it. With an exclamation of amazed delight he spread it open. It was a woman's small handkerchief.

Prue's?

More amazing still was the damp and crushed fold of paper the handkerchief contained. Rob could have shouted for joy. In his excited haste he tore one crease; but there could be no doubt now.

It was the other half of the page that bore Prue's note to his parents.

His hands trembled so he could hardly read the writing, small and well-formed—showing that Prue had taken her time with this, not hurried in a scribble as she had in the note her father was so angrily cherishing.

"Rob," the note began, "I hope you will find this. I am going away to be happy—happier than I can be here. I am never able to satisfy Father or please him. He grows more severe to me every day. I am like what Mother was when she was young and I shall go away from home to be happy as she did. Father thinks I should marry some town boy. Why should I, if I can do better? You can't know all my feelings, but you are glad to be at sea—away from home. For the work I do you can hire a girl—and there is enough money for that, with what will be saved from my silly finery, as Father

calls it. I can say you showed me, Rob, how to do it; but you got away easily. I hope to see you somewhere, sometime. Good-by.

"PRUE."

There was a flourish below her name that proved how pleased she was at the relief she was going to find for herself.

"She went with all her eyes open," Rob declared to himself, "but where? Who went with her? Chester?"

Then Rob knew he must try to find them and reason with Prue to come home. At least he must get some certain news about her for his stricken parents. Perhaps the certainty that she was dead would be the best report he could bring home.

Did Gaffer Warren know of this note? Had he been trying in his roundabout way to make Rob find it? Was the old man so weak in his wits as Rob had been so ready to believe? Had Prue ever confided in him? Ever had him carry messages to the manor house? Old Gaffer Warren had the run of all places in the countryside, was known and fed everywhere. Could he be coaxed into talking? Rob saw how difficult it would be to get Gaffer Warren to do anything against which he set his will. He could easily be stone deaf and unless it was a clever trick of his own devising, his wits did grow dim and flicker out completely.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HOW AN ARMY CAN BE FED

THREE days later the fate of Prue and the determination of Rob to find her were driven from the minds of the Rennie family by a series of events that marked a change affecting the whole world, even the government of those distant lands they had heard spoken of as the colonies and plantations of New England in America.

Scattered groups of riders passed near the village and through it—all by their dress and talk King's men and all traveling north and east. One day Rob in the lower meadow saw one suddenly emerge from a path in the trees and bring his beautiful horse to a stand as he gazed in a puzzled manner at his surroundings. Rob scrambled over the wall and hurried toward him.

"Can I help you, Sir?" he called.

"Egad, I must be lost," the other said comically, pushing back his long curls from his throat and shoulders. "This looked like a shortcut and I was behind, and even my horse knows I'm in a maze."

"Do you know where you want to go?" asked Rob, showing all his teeth.

For a moment the proud rider looked as though he

might resent what sounded like an impertinent gibe at his good sense, but he saw Rob's smile, and laughed outright.

"In a way I do, my lad."

"Lad yourself," Rob retorted inwardly, for the fine gentleman with all his gaudy clothes, strong horse, and air of the world, was not a day older than the country boy.

"Is the Chester estate near here?" the Royalist asked.

Rob went three steps nearer.

"Are the Chesters at home?" he asked quickly.

"No; that they are not. We are only a few and sleep there one night to wait for others tomorrow."

"Then what?" Rob was growing bolder.

"Why, surely you know," the other's eyes opened wider. "Fight for our master, the King."

"If you can ride along the edge of the woods," Rob directed him, "turn in under the oak there. You can hardly see the path, but your horse will follow it. Make him bear always to the right, and you will go clear around the village and come out opposite the main gate to Chesterwald."

"Then I may get there before my party. And avoid the village—like as not full of enemies to His Majesty and full of sour-faced, unhappy Parliament men. I hope you be none. You look strong. You should come with our foot."

"I know not—yet," Rob answered.

"I like your *yet*. Well, here's a token to get your country sweetheart a ribbon. With my thanks," and he tossed Rob a coin and skillfully guided his horse with hand and knee along the sloping edge of the woods.

Rob caught the silver penny and said to himself, "Advance pay to try to make a soldier of me. But I think the King a wicked tyrant none the less."

In this Rob was a true son of his stern father and a fellow-believer with most of the men of the village. Taxes for more than ten years had been higher and more strictly collected, even a new-fangled ship money, though as they protested, they lived so far inland they had never in years past paid ship money. That had been collected only from sea-coast towns who owed their prosperity to the waters and who should pay extra sums for protection by the King's ships against pirates and foreign enemies. Some reckless Englishmen, so they heard, had dared to refuse to pay. Old Rennie had tried to get several of his neighbors to stand with him in a refusal made to the King's officer, but when the news came that men with titles and high in authority had been promptly seized and thrown into that frightening place—the Tower of London—all the men hereabouts had paid their rates, though grumbling enough both before and after.

The scattered riders were followed by larger bands composed of fewer fine gentlemen but more coarse and rude fellows whose orders were sharp and whose

curses were loud and deep. One or two villagers had dared to answer a couple of insolent fellows and were forced to take to their heels to save their skins from a beating with the flat of their swords. One farmer had been so angered by a surly fellow that watching his chance he knocked him on the head with a cart-wheel spoke and left him for dead behind the stable. Some companions came upon him later and carried him off, cursing the whole family roundly but not daring to stay lest they be cut off from their main body by darkness.

Rob's mother was in continual terror for her two men. Her husband was long suffering, slow to anger, but a thundering storm when once aroused and an immovable rock of granite when once he had made up his mind. Reports and stories she had heard and overheard made her anxious lest either of them be led into some squabble when words might lead to more serious blows. With all the tact she could muster she tried to keep her husband close to the house and under her protecting eye. Her son was not so easy to manage. He had a roving streak in his nature (she believed he had it from her and so she sympathized with him) and wandered off more frequently but had only far-away glimpses of the passersby until he had been paid for showing the way to Chesterwald. This and the farmer's brave stroke with the spoke of the wheel had excited Rob. He was growing more and more curious about the gatherings to the north

and east. Important cities were there, Hull and York and Newcastle, and great stores of wealth. The tyrant King's followers might be making themselves masters of all that prosperous section of England. What then would happen to the natives who had not joined his ranks?

"Little will happen to us, Lad." His father had tried to calm him. "In this tiny village, we're only small potatoes. The Royalists will be after only the big fish."

"Yes," his wife reminded him, "but usually little potatoes are cooked and served up with big fish."

This sally brought a hearty laugh and for days the good wife Rennie was famous for her witty remark on the troubles.

Then late one afternoon Rennie came storming and stumbling into the kitchen breathing deeply and staunching the blood streaming from a great gash above his left eye. His wife uttered a sharp shriek as she rushed to fetch a basin of cold water at once.

"I knew it would come to this," was her first remark.

"Father, who did that?" Rob asked angrily.

Rennie had been met by some fellows traveling on foot, a half dozen of them, who stopped and asked him to sell some of his chickens to them. He had refused, for he wanted to keep all his poultry for himself because of the eggs he could sell. They had haggled with him for a few moments, when one squint-

eyed drover from a city—he had described himself as such—told Rennie that if he did not look sharp his fellows would catch all his chickens for themselves and give no money for them, and he would gladly drive off all the pigs and cows at the same price.

While the altercation was at its height a rider with some kind of command had galloped up and ordered the men on their way. But he had taken in the quarrel at a glance and not liking the expression of opposition and contempt on the husbandman's face he had stopped for just a second.

"Take that for your insolence to the King's men," he had called, and leaning over he had struck Rennie a sharp blow across the face with his heavy leather riding whip. Then he had spurred away after his foot company and had disappeared.

The pain was bitter enough to the old man, but worse than the cut his skin had suffered was the cut his pride had felt. Could he have laid his hands on the ruffian, he would have wrung his neck as he did a chicken's. Could he have called those scoundrels out one by one, he could have pounded the face of every one of them to a jelly in quick order. Could he have reached a stout cudgel and backed himself against a wall, he would have taken them all on at once for single stick. Could he have guessed what that rider had intended to do, he would have seized that horse by the head and made him toss that fellow clear off his back to land on his scurvy head.

"Could I have— Ouch!" he yelled as his wife washed a tender spot in his face.

"Yes, could you have done any of those active brutal things, you would. But just now, could you hold yourself still and let me get at this cut, 'twill do much better. Men are such babies when it comes to little hurts."

"Little hurts, indeed," her big husband murmured, but he did try to hold his head quiet under her attentions though he winced inwardly as she poulticed the open wound.

"What's that?" they all exclaimed at once, starting toward the door.

There was a sudden cackling among the chickens and a scuffling noise.

"Some animal in the chicken yard!" declared Rob's mother stopping to seize a long switch.

"Drat him and this bandage," added Rennie, following her.

At the door they suddenly stood stock still, for there with a pike and sword drawn to bar the way stood two strangers.

"No, you don't. Stay inside," ordered the younger.

"What's the meaning of this?" Rennie demanded.

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, or it will be the worse for you."

"But the chickens—" wailed Mother Rennie.

"Food for the King's bands, if you must know,"

the first speaker explained with a slight show of deference to a woman. "But you must stay indoors," he warned, extending his heavy sword as she instinctively started forward to save her poultry.

The two prisoners could see a half score men darting about, cornering the fowl and bundling their legs together for easy carrying over their shoulders or across the necks of horses. As the cackling and scurrying died down there, it was succeeded by frightened squeaks and grunts and the thud of fat bodies that had hardly ever moved, now exerting themselves to escape from their rough-handed captors.

"The pigs! All my fine pigs," wailed Rennie, pushing his body against the pike, then recoiling as he felt it press harder against his middle.

Rob, when the commotion outside had begun, had started toward the door behind his father and mother. Having gone through more than one tavern brawl and sailors' rough-and-tumble fights in strange ports, he had stopped short and slipped to one side behind the covering protection of the wall to learn what was really happening outside. He heard the few words exchanged. If there had been a window above the door he might have slipped up and dropped some heavy piece of furniture upon the two guards, but that was impossible. He could form a fair estimate of the number of men outside—too many for a fair fight. Could he save anything? Had they taken the horse yet?

Rob moved cautiously along the wall to the far door, passed along the narrow passage to the side, gained an open window, poked his head out through the climbing vines that nearly hid it, ventured one

leg, then the other, and dropped upon the ground with hardly a swish of the bushes and grass.

He could make a dash from the corner of the house. He would try it.

He had hardly taken two steps when a heavily-booted foot shot out against his. As his body struck the ground he felt a weight thud upon his back, and

at the same time the sharp point of a pike dug him in the thigh.

"It's the young one," the man astride his back called.

"Haul him up," suggested the pikeman.

There was no sense in struggling against such odds, Rob knew, but he kept his muscles tense, ready to spring away if his two captors showed a second's carelessness. If he could loosen the horse and give it a thwack it would run away and possibly escape; at any rate give these thieves a chase and so save some other live property. Or he might frighten the cows to slip away. He had no such luck. With a short grunted explanation he was delivered to the two guards at the house door, and ushered back into the company of his silently protesting parents.

Peering between them Rob saw the horse led away, the pigs hobbled by the legs and dragged off, the bundles of fowl trussed up and borne off, the ducks and geese alone voicing comical complaints at their joltings. Three horsemen rode about in a last inspection, not condescending to give so much as a glance to the despoiled owners. The pikeman at the doorway disappeared around the near corner of the wall to reappear a second later leading the swordman's horse. In spite of its being used by a follower of the hated King, Rob and his father had to admire its build, especially the powerful long hind legs that must carry its rider like the wind.

Eyes on the animal, the three were totally unprepared for what its owner did. Dropping his sword's point, he stepped across the sill of the door. Before his advance Rennie and his wife recoiled slowly. The young Royalist made a lunge and pushed Rennie sideways and backwards upon his wife. Their feet became entangled and down they went in a confused mass upon the floor. Rob's mother, feeling herself toppling, half turned to throw her arms out to Rob, who tried to save her, but succeeded only in partly breaking the force of her fall by going down under her.

With a mocking laugh the cause of their predicament banged the door shut behind him and sprang into his saddle. The footman seized the saddle flap and straight across the treasured flower bed, trampling the nurselings to the ground, went horse and runner, out of sight before the irate Rennie, cursing as much as his religious practices and beliefs allowed, had rolled over, scrambled to his feet, dashed at the door-latch, sprung outside and gazed about his quiet property from which all signs of life—including the marauders—had completely vanished.

What was worse at that moment, his exertions had loosened the bandage above his eye, so for the second time that day he had to undergo poulticing.

All the excited men who gathered in the village street had similar tales to tell. The raid had been well-planned, for no man had been able to go to the

help of his neighbor. A few of the Royalists had been knocked on the head or overturned, but in the end such offenses had been heavily avenged. There were more broken pates and gashed faces among the townsmen than among the looters.

While the husbandmen and other livestock owners were loud in their complaints and maledictions, Harrison, the ruddy butcher, looked on silently.

"Look here, Harrison," Rennie turned toward him suddenly. "You likely had several cattle in your yards. What did they do to you?"

The round-faced meat merchant, looking not unlike one of his own fatted calves, scratched his hair for a second before he drawled out his answer.

"Why, Rennie, didn't you have a chance to sell your stock? Seems to me I heard you say that's how you got your decorated eyebrow."

"Yes. But I wouldn't sell. Least not to feed the King's soldiers, enemies to all Parliament men, and all good Englishmen."

"Well," Harrison drawled. "That's as may be. I'm not an owner of live stock. I buy and I sell, not according to the owner before me or after me, but to anybody that wants meat, dressed or undressed. So I sold all my cattle, some on the hoof and some on the hook."

It was a truthful account of his trade, too slim a reason for calling him by any name, so Rennie and the villagers who shared his views dared not brand

Harrison what they thought him to be—a deep-dyed Royalist. Had they pressed their questions on all the citizens they would have noticed a striking agreement. The men who disapproved of the King's measures and motives had lost their property by confiscation; those who had spoken loudly against all the moves of the stubborn Parliament had managed to sell theirs.

Reports from the more sparsely settled districts were more threatening. Several farmers in protecting their property had been run through with swords, a few dangerously. Worse, there were reports—Rennie and his friends hoped they were unreliable—that several men had been shot dead upon their lands. And no redress or satisfaction could be gained in the Courts, for these also were in confusion, some sitting as usual under the King's orders and as many refusing to obey his writs and applying to the Parliament for guidance in affairs.

"It means civil war, Rob," his father said seriously one night. "The trained bands in the cities are being ordered out. Some declare for that tyrant the King, and some for the protector of our rights, the Parliament. What are you going to do, my lad?"

"Fight," said Rob quietly.

And that was why, early the next morning, with no word of farewell to his mother, Rob was trudging across country to the south to join the Parliament's army to protect Englishmen in their rights and freedom against a grinding tyrant.

CHAPTER NINE

THE STANDARD AND THE STORM

It was a strange army that Robert joined. If the men—rank and officers—who composed it had not been so serious in their intentions and so brave in their actions, the Parliament Army at that stage of the conflict would have been ridiculous. Few in the body to which Rob first attached himself knew anything about warfare. Their idea seemed to be no more than to get a burly musket, some powder, a few bullets, and then to shoot as many Royalists as they could. When their ammunition was gone, their only thought was to save their hides, so they—like so many frightened partridges—would break and scatter to cover. Their officers could not get them to stand in solid ranks to receive a galloping charge by a small company of King's followers. Many of these, when they saw how little resistance the Commonwealth men could make, satisfied themselves with striking them over the pates with the flat of their swords rather than brutally running them through the body. Others they captured and marched away to the nearest town to prison.

But the Commonwealth Army had few muskets

in these early months. Most of the men were given pikes and spears and told to stick them into the horses of the riding Royalists and bring them low upon the ground. Then they were to seize their weapons and make them prisoners, or if the fine gentlemen still resisted, kill them with their own weapons. These were the orders. In the irregular skirmishes on the field the Commonwealth men soon learned that most Royalist horses were not brought low so readily. A dismounted rider might use his pistols and sword and dirk against a pikeman. He might do more than defend himself; he might turn the tables upon the soldier of the people's rights and disarm him, or knock him over the head with the butt of his pistols.

The men of Rob's company did take a few Royalist prisoners. They were more trouble than they were worth. What could be done with them? All the castles, most of the town fortresses, and the city prisons were still in the hands of the Royalists. After a few days the Commonwealth guards grew less watchful—most of them having never been trained for such dull tasks as sitting still watching a door and window, and the Royalists walked out. Or their friends organized a rescue party and with a brief ride and a few encouraging yells drove the guards from the hut or house or cellar and released the uncomfortable captives.

Discipline was at a low ebb. After a brisk engagement with a few exchanges of ball and powder, a few

sword and pike thrusts, some advancing but more retreating, many of the private soldiers (and not a few of the officers) would throw down their weapons and scurry into the byways and along the hedges to

escape, or tamely allow themselves to be taken prisoners. When the Royalists left the district and there were few signs of their looting raids, the soldiers began to think of their homes, their farms, and their families, and drifted back to their regular tasks. Especially was this true in the cold winter months

when neither side in the early years of the struggle carried on the campaign.

Rob, now with two pistols—not mates, and a sword with the end broken off short, but not yet a musket, with five other adventurous young and old men under a corporal, was stationed in a barn on a prosperous farm to watch a neighboring manor house, whose lord with all his family had fled to the Royalist forces. The Commonwealth men believed there were stores in the house or near it, and hoped that some member of the household would return. Then they would capture him and force him to deliver what they had not been able to discover for themselves. The band had little to do except eat, drink, and sleep, but they stopped every passer-by and listened open-mouthed and wide-eyed to every report of activity in all other parts of the country.

Portsmouth, the shipping center with vast stores, had declared for the King. Hull had still held out against all parleys and skirmishes by Royalist parties. Rob thrilled at every report of the gallantry of the brave little garrison there in the face of royalty itself. Boston, on the coast, had spirited more supplies into Hull. The King had intended an attack on Hull from a neighboring hill at Beverley, but had given up the attempt and withdrawn again into York. Far to the south, the Parliament at Westminster was growing bolder in its accusations against the King and his Royalist followers. The wealthy and pow-

erful city of London had not yet declared for either side, but the common people—and there were thousands more of them than of the aristocrats—wanted to deliver everything the city had to the Commonwealth Parliament and Army.

For several days, now, no Royalist riders had been encountered in the country and the Commonwealth volunteers were becoming more restive than ever. Then both settlers and soldiers were startled into loud-mouthed discussions and protests. The King had issued a proclamation against all the acts of the disobedient Parliament, declared them guilty and forbade "all his subjects to yield any obedience to them"; and required all men who could bear arms to join him at Nottingham on the twenty-fifth of August following, on which day he would set up his Royal Standard there, which all good subjects were obliged to attend.

The news ran across all England as fire spreads across a field of dried grass. No more the scattered raids and skirmishes, the chance encounters of small bodies of men scantily equipped and drilled; no longer the voluntary coming and going of troops; no longer the "I will if I will and I won't if I won't" on both sides; but from that day forward regular armies regularly enlisted and furnished and paid (where was the money to be had?) and officered until these acts against the King and his laws were stamped out completely in all parts of his Kingdom.

The tightening of orders in the Commonwealth Army could not be effected at once. Rob was bored with the monotony of guard duty. If he was going to be a soldier, he wanted to see some fighting. Drilling even was not enough for him. What would the setting up of the Royal Standard be like? Borrowing a nag from the stables beneath the barn, Rob rode away early one morning to report to his captain and to beg a favor, though he put it as a duty to the army.

Some one of their number should see the ceremony and report to the officers. Rob should be that person, he modestly informed the captain, because he was a native of this northern district of England, and moreover (and this Rob emphasized) he had been a sailor, still looked like a sailor, and therefore he could unsuspected get closer to the center of the day's proceedings and bring back a more accurate account than an easily recognized farmer or townsman of the north country.

So Rob took on once more the peculiar rolling walk of the sailor just on shore from his ship and began the long but pleasant tramp across the counties to Nottingham. At places where he slept or supped Rob let the conversation turn on the King's affairs. He gathered that the King was doing all he could, with the shortage of money under which he suffered, to hasten his levies of horse and foot, and to get ready a train of artillery, so that he might appear at Not-

tingham with a suitable and imposing guard for himself.

Rob overtook the King and his bodyguard at the pleasant city of Lincoln, where the Royalists despoiled the trained bands of the town of all their arms and ammunition. Next day he went to review his companies of horse, of which there were several troops well armed and under good officers, numbering some eight hundred men. When they marched they turned aside to make the thriving city of Coventry safe for His Majesty, but the gates were shut against them and so many of the horsemen were wounded from the walls that they had to give over the attempt. Rob's spirits rose with every reverse the Royalists underwent, and sank with every addition to their numbers as they marched.

The twenty-fifth of August was a wild and stormy day. All day bodies of horse and foot moved hither and yon about the town and the surrounding country. Toward six o'clock of the evening the King himself with a small escort rode to the crest of Castle Hill. Beside him but slightly to the rear rode Varney the Knight-Marshal, bearing the tightly-rolled Royal Standard. Into the socket Varney forced the staff and to the sound of a few hurrahs and the blare of many trumpets and the roll of a dozen drums the beautiful flag was unfurled to the gale. In the threatening light of the darkening stormy sky it was a thrilling sight as the warlike music continued. The riders

doffed their brilliantly plumed hats; and the city trained bands under the commands of their sheriff wheeled about the King's bodyguard.

Then Rob made himself remember that he was to keep his ears and eyes open and not be swayed as a girl might by a glorious flag and dazzling dress of courtiers and the stirring strains of trumpets and drums.

In spite of the horses, the plumes, the men, the hurrahs, and the music, Rob soon realized that it was a melancholy sight. Here was the King—whom Rob knew well by sight now—declaring war to the death against his protesting Parliament and subjects, yet the ceremony was accompanied by little show of power and by few followers. Not one regiment of foot had yet been brought hither. There was no great gathering of men. Arms and ammunition had not yet arrived from York. General sadness covered the town and men in melancholy tones prophesied doleful things.

Rob felt the general despair next day when he discovered that the Royal Standard had been blown down during the night by a strong gale. Not all that day, nor the next, could it be set up again until the tempest was spent.

The day following, Rob set off to join his captain with a light heart, for the unfortunate aspect of the affairs of the King gave him high hopes for the fortunes of the Commonwealth.

CHAPTER TEN

ROB GETS ARMOR

THE next year was spent by Rob in marches, countermarches, guard duty, skirmishes, hasty rides to meet Royalist parties that never arrived where they were expected, short visits at home snatched by leaving his troop for a few hours and forcing his horse along sunken roads and footpaths, being chased by superior numbers of King's horsemen, listening to long-winded sermons praising the Commonwealth cause, questioning every man he met and every prisoner he took for news that might lead to some inkling of the whereabouts and condition of Prue.

In the meantime the condition of the King was to Rob a fulfillment of the melancholy circumstances that attended what should have been the inspiriting ceremony of the setting up of the Royal Standard. Subjects who remained loyal to him kept repeating that "the King can do no wrong," but that was little satisfaction to those families whose fathers, sons, and brothers had been killed by his roving bands or his regular armies. At one time the King had not one barrel of powder nor one musket but expected everything from the efforts of his wife in Holland. The

Queen had fled to Holland where she had succeeded in selling or pawning all the crown jewels as well as all her own. She had obtained vast sums of money which she tried to send to the King's party at York. But so watchful were the Commonwealth spies in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, so swift were their ships upon the North Sea, that for a long time she could not find any means of sending this aid to her husband. Yet the King should have had three thousand pounds to pay his foot soldiers alone every week.

The temper of London had grown angrier. Lords were advised to quit the city lest their brains be beaten out by the apprentices and women in the streets. Sailors on the seas had turned against their captains and taken charge of their own ships, which they delivered over to Commonwealth leaders. When the King sent messengers from one part of England to another, three were captured for every one that completed his journey.

Youths of noble families, too young to know their own minds, enlisted on one side, and then under promises of larger lands or looted property deserted to the other, their service depending not on loyalty to a party or cause, but merely on what they thought they could get for themselves. Many changed sides so frequently that hardly anyone could be trusted. Green boys were given commands over troops of older seasoned men who had little respect for them. General Middleton was only eighteen when he first

fought for the Commonwealth. Soon he deserted and went over to the King.

If the King and his army were in sore straits, the Commonwealth Army was not much better off. It needed money and supplies as badly. Marching toward a town a captain would send in advance the order that the inhabitants must furnish within two days a thousand pairs of shoes and stockings. Arms were borrowed from the trained bands of cities and countries, yet often the foot soldiers had no better weapon than a cudgel. Not a pikeman in a whole company would have a corselet. Only a few of the musketeers had swords. Officers had back pieces of armor that did not match their breast pieces. Some of the foot soldiers had short pole-axes:—these were placed in the front ranks. Behind them were stationed the men with swords. There was at the beginning not one tent. There were few wagons.

When the forces neared towns and villages the blacksmiths fled and hid themselves so that they would not be forced to shoe the horses that suffered frightfully on the stony ways.

A besieged town—as Reading—might be reduced to a single barrel of powder before it would surrender. Often the garrison and inhabitants within the walls would eat most of their horses before relief would come.

Trade apprentices were told that if they enlisted in the Commonwealth Army their term of service

would be counted toward their freedom from apprenticeship. Many youths—mere children—though their parents knew nothing of it or refused their con-

sent, flocked to the recruiting officers and were enrolled. Often they fought against their own fathers and other relatives.

Great relief came when the Parliament invited all persons to contribute money or plate upon which in-

terest at eight per cent was paid. Sums thus obtained were to support the Commonwealth horse troops, so Rob was deeply concerned in the returns. From London, aldermen were appointed to sit in the Guildhall to receive the metal and have it coined. In ten days enormous sums were provided. The Commonwealth Party itself was amazed at its success. The troopers were assured of supplies and equipment.

Rob breathed more easily. He had a good horse and had so far escaped with a few scratches and bumps in his rushes with King's riders. But the war had not ended, as many had predicted, within a few months. There had entered into the soldiers on both sides a vigor of determination. Rob had by strength and agility parried a few vigorous thrusts of an enraged officer whose horse luckily stumbled in a rabbit hole and threw him. Had one of those blows landed on Rob's unarmored body, it would have been—he felt in recalling the matter later—the next world for him. So he was pleased that London was coining money and engaging smiths and armorers regularly to turn out breastplates. He never thought of his back, for by now he considered himself enough of a soldier to be able to keep his face turned toward any enemy.

Men advanced rapidly in the Commonwealth Army, for it was a prime belief with them that all men were equal. Royalty and aristocracy were no better than other men. One strong party among the

soldiers gloried in the nickname of Levellers. Who could tell? Any short sharp struggle now and Rob might win an officer's commission. All he needed to do was to attract the favorable notice of his commander, Sir Arthur Haselrig. During the long months spent in winter quarters near London Rob was the most impatient for the return of the open season, when with some battle array, the army might take the field again.

It was queer-looking armor that was finally delivered at the barracks. Rob had had only slight acquaintance with body armor, but he had always imagined that new corselets and helmets were polished until in the sun they dazzled a beholder's eyes. The piles of curved plates thrown higgledy-piggledy on the guard-room floor were dark and stained. And polish? They still bore the marks of the hammers and tools that had fashioned them. The helmets looked like barbers' basins. The straps reminded him of horses' harness. The plates themselves were like huge cooking utensils.

"They call that stuff armor!" one horseman remarked dolefully.

"I'd as lief be a cook," said another, pretending to stir soup in an upturned head covering.

"Here's a good fish platter," and a third offered them the slightly curved sheet into which he had been trying vainly to fit his broad shoulders comfortably.

"Don't try to force whale steak into a trout dish,"

said a smaller trooper, taking the giant's piece and holding it against his own back. "I could be nicely browned in this. See?"

Pulling and pushing at the pile of soiled junk on the floor and tables the men tried awkwardly to fit their figures into the steel garb forged and hammered for their protection. A motley crowd they were. No front and back piece matched in color. They tugged and puffed at the straps until all were suited. Then they posed for one another's admiration.

"We're soldiers now, I warrant," and the giant strutted.

"I hope my horse can carry all this extra hardware," the short Darcy hoped, and was greeted with a laugh.

"Soldiers indeed!" exclaimed Rob, himself hemmed in all round and almost hidden by a helmet too large for his head. "Darcy called himself a fish a moment ago. But I say we look like a company of lobsters."

There was an approving shout.

"Lobsters! Lobsters! We are! We are! The Regiment of Lobsters!"

And so this famous regiment was named, glorying in the description and becoming as renowned in their own army and as feared by the King's troops as the invincible Ironsides of the great chief Cromwell himself.

Early that spring five hundred of the Lobsters marched under Sir Arthur Haselrig to join with Sir

William Waller. Then their iron shells aided them well. Their appearance struck fear to the King's men for these horsemen were the first ever seen thus armored. They gave the King's horsemen a severe rude shock, for their swords made no hurts upon them, but glanced off or dulled their edges or blunted their points. So the King's troops wavered, broke, turned, and fled; and Rob, caring no more for the thwack of a sword upon his head, chest, or back than a playful whale cares for the smack of a rower's oar, rode and shouted and cut and slashed and overturned and captured and drove back to his own army so many surly prisoners that Sir Arthur Haselrig did take note and recommended him on the field of battle to Sir William Waller; and Sir William Waller on the spot made him a lieutenant of horse and in his dispatches to Cromwell cited the young man by name and craved a regular commission for him.

After two weeks the sealed parchment came and young Robert Rennie was the happiest officer in all England.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ROB RIDES AT DAWN

Yet with all their supposed wealth and all their recruits and all their unheard-of schemes for turning raw boys into sturdy fighting men, the fortunes of the Commonwealth Army sank lower and lower. Every day leaders, horsemen, and foot deserted to the King's camps. Skippers brought ships and sailors from France and Holland to attack cities and castles along the coast. Farmers would serve only for a few idle months, then slip away to their fields again.

Near Doncaster, Rob—now captain of a troop—with several hundred others had been besieged for many weeks. The pinch of hardship was just beginning to make the common soldiers complain and grow restive, for nothing was harder to these new

troops than to do nothing. Hunger was likely to make matters worse within a few days, but the water supply was excellent in a profusion of wells.

A council of officers was called.

"Can we deliver some sudden blow that will give spirit to our forces and astonish the enemy?" asked the governor of the castle.

"The bolder, the more reckless, the better chance of success it has," added a general.

"Their general and one or two other officers are quartered in the inn of a small village only ten miles from here," said the quietest officer of the council.

"There's an idea in that," nodded the general. "Anyone here know this country?"

"Captain Rennie does as well as anybody."

"I used to live not very far from here," Rob replied as he leaned forward to attend to the details of the plan. Suddenly he flushed and straightened himself in his chair.

"Their general's chief aide will be in a neighboring chamber," the quietest man was speaking. "They are always together. That aide is Roy Donald Chester. You know him, Rennie?" he asked, his keen eyes catching the change in Rob's position.

"Know about him," Rob answered.

"Like to make him prisoner?" the governor struck in.

"Or run him through," Rob's eyes flashed.

"Not unless you have to," warned the governor.

"Bring them all in here and let us use them to get better terms when we have to surrender."

There was a dismal pause. So—after all their efforts and privations, they would have to march out of this stronghold upon whatever terms they could wring from their bitter foes. They would be easier if the Commonwealth men had some captives of high rank.

Ten of the speediest horsemen and bravest fighters were told off. Any one of them would have been able to traverse that country with his eyes bandaged. They rode forth from the castle soon after dark a few nights later in high spirits though every man of them knew in his heart that he was as surely a forlorn hope volunteer as if his friends had preached a funeral sermon over him and his steed.

Hushed they rode through the tall grass of the fields so slowly that it was almost dawn before they emerged from a narrow private path across rich farm land into the regular highway from York. They had ridden round the little village where the Royalist leaders lay, and were now approaching it—not as from the besieged castle of Doncaster but as from the King's city of York. No guards would that day be suspecting any Commonwealth riders coming from that quarter.

Rob's party drew rein behind a clump of trees, the last shield from the Royalist guards that were no doubt on the crest of the next hill. Here they

brushed one another's habits, and shook out the colored cloaks they had donned to make themselves look more like King's men, and fluffed up the ribbons and plumes they had sewed upon their shoulders and hats, and then breaking into a gentle lope, they began to converse in ordinary tones, as though they had no reason for concealing their approach from any man. This careless manner of chatting and laughing totally deceived the few guards at the wall of the first house of the village.

Rennie threw them a graceful gesture of welcome as he rode up before the small knot of men, tired and yawning from their night's uneventful watching.

"Good morning, men. A little sleepy, I see."

"More than little. Curses on this long night of doing nothing but listening to rabbits and birds."

Most of Rennie's companions had let their horses wander past the guards.

"Long ride?" asked the corporal. "Where from?"

"Near York," said the traveler who had taken Rob's place as his horse wandered after the others. As an afterthought Rob turned back to them.

"You may help us," he began. "Where does your general lodge?" He knew this well enough. "We have a letter for him from the King's quarters."

"I'll show you," the corporal offered quickly, glad of any relief from this dull monotony of guard duty, the bane of all military life.

The twilight of dawn was gradually brightening

into the glow of sunrise, but the way to the best inn of the village was still as quiet as the grave. No cobblestones clanged under the hoofs of the horses, that held their pace to a slow walk to suit the steps of the obliging corporal. At sight of the barred inn-yard gates, Rangely, riding between Rob and the guide, tossed him a silver penny, and the sleepy fellow hastened away to moisten his throat with a pot of ale and a toast to the King.

The sleepy stable boy hardly glanced at the riders as he drew back one gate and propped it open with a faggot.

"Where's the general's room?" Rangely asked him as he and his three companions slipped from their saddles and handed their reins to the two, who, still mounted, were to wait below in the stableyard.

"There," and the fellow pointed to a pair of windows under the eaves in the corner farthest from the street.

"And Chester?" asked Rob.

"Next room that way," the yokel pointed to the left and then slowly climbed the short ladder to the hay in the mow to snatch an extra nap.

Into the low dim passageway the four intruders tiptoed and up the creaking steps to the uneven corridor on the second floor. Except an occasional stamp of a horse in the yard or in the stable there was not a sound in the still morning. Slowly every man drew

his long sharp sword and slipped stealthily along the passageway.

Rangely and Morris, leading, soon reached the door to the general's bedroom. Rob and Darcy stopped before that of his aide. Rob's heart stood still and his breath stopped. A nod from Rangely, who had his hand on the door latch, and the two doors were swung into the two rooms quickly and quietly.

At the noise the door made the Royalist general turned quickly in his bed, then sat bolt upright. Two sword points were uncomfortably close to his throat and breast. His thin hair was touseled and his watery eyes blinked dully.

"General Pomfret," Rangely spoke clearly in a low voice, "no outcry."

The waking man looked threateningly toward the next room.

"No help from there. My men are there, too," Rangely warned him.

The blinking eyes grew steady with the seriousness of the position.

"You are our prisoner. You may make your choice —to be killed at once." Pomfret glanced at the two determined faces across his bed and at the two menacing sharp points still close to his skin. "Or quietly go with us. No delay. No resistance. Put on your clothes. There's a horse ready for you below. Then go with us."

The two sword points moved ever so little while

the two soldiers waited what to them seemed an eternity. Pomfret's astonishment was dispelled by the clear threat he had heard. He nodded toward the pile of clothes beside the head of his bed.

"I'll go with you," he promised.

Rangely drew back the bed covers so that there could be no delay and watched Pomfret narrowly while he hastily dressed. Morris, his sword still bare, moved to the window and behind its curtains watched the inn-yard and their waiting horses and companions below.

When Pomfret was fully dressed he moved toward the table on which lay his sword. Rangely also moved.

"By your leave, General Pomfret," he said with a polite bow. "We shall not trouble you to carry anything."

"You are very kind," said the prisoner with a bitter smile.

Slight sounds reached their ears from the next room. Rangely held up his hand for a second. All was still. Then there was the sound of several pairs of feet going along the corridor. Morris grinned and Rangely motioned him to the door. With a courteous sweep of his hand he signed General Pomfret to place himself behind Morris, and in this order the three marched along the passageway and down the stairs.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE FIGURE IN THE BED

When Rob saw the door of General Pomfret's room pushed open, he had his hand on the latch to the door of Chester's bedroom. He turned to Darcy.

"There may be two in this room," he whispered. "Maybe a woman. Don't do anything to her. Don't frighten her. Keep her quiet. And let me attend to Chester."

Darcy nodded understandingly and they entered.

There were two narrow beds and a figure in each. One person—Rob did not try to learn which—was breathing deeply, still sleeping peacefully though there had been noise enough to waken any ordinary sleeper.

The figure in the near bed rose to a sitting position and as quickly the point of cold steel touched his chest. Darcy as quickly held his sword above the shoulder of the still sleeping figure.

"Roy Chester?" Rob asked in a whisper.

"What's that to you?" sleepily drawled the good-looking young man staring from the depths of the soft mattress.

"Is my sister Prue with you?" Rob demanded in

a threatening tone. Darcy's eyebrows rose. So that was why Rob had given the orders that he did as they paused before the door.

Roy Chester rubbed his eyes and laughed heartily. The concealed figure lying in the other bed broke off a long breath in the middle, stirred anxiously, then slipped further down under the covers.

"No noise," ordered Rob and Chester stifled his laugh.

"What did you ask me?" he inquired, looking at Rob, who was about to lose his temper.

"Is my sister Prue with you?"

"You forget that I have not the pleasure of being acquainted with you. I don't even know your last name. Commonwealth soldier, I suppose? So how do I know which of the many Prues you're asking for? Is she good-looking?" Then he added jestingly. "She would be if she resembles her brother."

Rob fidgeted at this talk.

"Please be careful with your sword. I don't mind nice clean cuts, but I do hate to be scratched."

"I've a mind to give you a cut," but Rob's eyes contradicted his words. In spite of his suspicions that the fellow was trying to cover knowledge by his jests, he felt a liking for him.

"Is she," Rob repeated, "is she in that bed?"

Roy Chester's eyes gleamed and Rob's suspicions were confirmed. The fellow had been trying to trick

him. The sword point made the Royalist drop back to his elbows. This was becoming too serious.

"See for yourself. I suppose war excuses any kind of treatment by you rebels to a gentleman's companion."

"Here, Darcy. Keep this man quiet."

Rob hastened to the other bed and although in any other circumstances he would have despised himself for what he was about to do, he moved directly to the pillows, seized the edge of the covers and in spite of the resistance of the occupant's clutched hands, threw them half way down the bed.

The mussed head and red face that gazed up at him with blinking eyes from the hollow belonged to no woman.

"Tom Harrison!" Rob cried in spite of himself.

Even Darcy chuckled at Rob's embarrassment. Roy Chester was rolling about his bed in a fit of delight.

"Treatment of a gentleman's companion," he kept repeating.

"Rob," Harrison stuttered, "your sister did not go off with Mr. Chester here."

"No," admitted Chester, "I'm not so fortunate. I must compliment you on her looks though. Any gentleman should be happy to be seen with her."

"Then you knew her," Rob retorted quickly.

"Now that I know which Prue you meant."

Tom Harrison had regained his courage.

"TOM HARRISON!" ROB CRIED IN SPITE OF HIMSELF

"So if you came to find your sister, you'd better get out and let us sleep," he advised, dropping with a grunt into the hollow of his bed.

"Mr. Chester, I'll have to trouble you to get up and dress quickly and quietly. Our prisoner. No delay."

Chester turned his eyes toward the next room.

"Your general is a prisoner, too. Almost dressed by this time. So hurry."

As Chester threw his feet out of his bed his eyes fell upon his sword lying across the nearest chair.

"I'll just hold this for you," Darcy remarked politely as he took possession of it.

"Fortunes of war," was all Chester commented as he began to dress.

"Rennie," asked Darcy, "what shall we do with the other one? We haven't horses enough. What is he, anyway?"

"Oh, he?" Rob watched the now terrified Tom Harrison hidden again by the bed covers. "A butcher's boy. Attorney's ink pot. Perhaps by now an informer."

"We can't take him. Let me fix him," Darcy offered.

The bed clothes gave a terrified twitch as Harrison heard Darcy's frightening words.

"I'll truss him up like one of his own pigs," he whispered to Rob.

The morning was pleasant, so it could not have

been cold that made Harrison's body shake as he stood beside his bed waiting the gentle attentions of Darcy. With a ripped corner of the pillow case the trooper made a tight gag that soon silenced the

captive's rapid sputtering. The window curtain cords bit into his wrists and ankles.

Roy Chester was almost completely dressed when Darcy finished his pleasant task of binding Harrison. There he stood beside his bed, his knees bent either with fright or because of the bonds, his eyes fixed upon every move the two captors made.

"At your service," Chester announced.

"Just a minute, Rennie. A little last attention to our fatted calf here."

Darcy made a pass at Harrison's nose and the prisoner started backwards, fell over the bed, and measured his length upon it. He rolled over to the middle and lay there panting. Before he could make another motion, Darcy had seized the mattress from Chester's bed, piled it upon Tom Harrison's twitching body, and had thrown all the bed covers upon the mass.

It was this noise that had reached the party in General Pomfret's bedroom. As that trio passed the aide's door, Darcy, Chester, and Rob stepped out and they moved downstairs with no other sound than their muffled tread.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

AT THE TOWN'S END

THE troopers who had parted at the inn gate from the four captors had ridden on through the town to its further end—but the end nearest to their besieged castle of Doncaster. Here, as they expected, they found a small guard of horse and foot, similar in every respect to the one they had passed in entering the town—similar in number, similar in boredom at the end of their night's watch, and similar in unmilitary carelessness. They had never seen these riders before, but since they came from the town itself, they readily assumed they were of their own forces. They omitted to challenge them, and as the strangers were willing to chat, they were soon as good comrades as if they had weathered several campaigns together.

Best of all, the newcomers were generous, too, as well as talkative.

"Night watch dull duty," said one sympathetically.

"Worst of all slow tasks," agreed a guard stretching his arms and spitting dryly.

"How long do you stop here?"

"Hard to say." Then turning to the clustered guards he slowly added in explanation. "We're only

staying for our officer, who went in to speak with the general."

"Time for a drink, I hope," added another of the Commonwealth horsemen.

"Let's try it," a third produced some coins. "Where's the nearest tap-room?"

"Right over against us," and all the members of the two parties trooped across to pledge their healths. When the tankards were emptied, most of the guards, with hearty good wishes, repaired to their quarters, so that although by now it was fully day, that end of the town was as little watched and protected as though there were no war going on and no Commonwealth forces within ten miles.

General Pomfret kept his eyes alertly moving as he was escorted through the stable yard, past the gate, and into the village street. There he had expected to find a company of at least a few hundred horse, for he had believed that his forces had been overpowered by superior numbers of Commonwealth men.

To his amazement he saw a peaceful deserted town. Awaiting him and his captors were only their four empty horses and the two watchers. The general, who had surrendered so far to overwhelming odds, was a brave man who could count the cost of warlike acts in an instant. Why should two of the King's officers submit tamely to a marauding raid in the heart of his own garrison? Upstairs the advantage

had been entirely with the invading four. Down here in the street the advantage was entirely with him. It would be cowardly to go silently.

He counted the horses. None extra for him. They were going to bind him behind one of their riders. He waited until that man had mounted and was by his position unable to help his companions. Then with a supreme effort Pomfret wrenched aside and tried to dash away. Chester saw his plan and half turned when Darcy's fingers closed tightly round his throat. The little trooper was a better soldier than most, for knowing that his charge was Chester he stuck to him and forced him up into the saddle of his own horse, then mounted quickly behind him, ready to spur away as soon as ordered.

Pomfret, with the recklessness of despair, was giving his captors more trouble than they liked. There was not only the danger of his escape, but the worse danger of his arousing the town, for he was yelling for help every time his mouth broke free from the silencing hand or arm that tried to subdue him.

Rob was panting with his exertion to master the swaying, twisting general. How much longer should they risk all their lives in the attempt to carry this wild man off? He had not enough breath to ask Rangely, but his blood-shot eyes spoke plainly enough.

"Will you yield yourself prisoner?" Rangely called to the struggling man.

Pomfret got his mouth free for a second.

"Never to a filthy Roundhead!" he declared. "Help! Help!" he yelled before Rob could close his jaws again.

"So be it, then," agreed Rangely. "Enough of this. Stand aside, men."

They obeyed. The staggering general pulled himself together, turned and looked defiantly at Rangely, and opened his lips to shout again for help. But no sound louder than a gasp came from his throat. Quicker than a flash of lightning Rangely had sprung forward and run his unruly prisoner clean through the heart with his own sword which he left protruding from the fallen body.

"To horse and away," Rangely commanded and down the village street they rode furiously.

Darcy, because he was the smallest, lightest of the party, had been directed to ride with Roy Chester before him.

At the town's end the sociable strangers had ordered a second round of tankards for the few guards, who, risking questions and reproofs at their quarters for not reporting at the regular time, had loitered on with them, when the men of both parties heard the unmistakable beat of hoofs coming toward them. Some of the soldiers of the garrison kept their noses buried in their ale and merely turned their eyes toward the

sound. A few raised their faces from the brim, but held the refreshing drinking mug with both hands. Only the strangers dropped their cups and sprang to action.

Seizing what weapons they could of the unwary sentries and drawing their own swords they set upon them with muffled cries of "Back! Back! On your lives!"

The unsuspecting victims, disturbed in their rest and despoiled of their morning potion, moved too slowly. Sharp sword pricks and blows rained upon them. Some hurled their pewter mugs at the attackers; some fell backward over benches; but as soon as they could recover their legs—their wits they recovered much later—they fled in as many different directions as there were men.

Springing to their saddles the drinkers glanced at their approaching friends, saw a captive on one horse, and felt that their raid had been successful. They spurred ahead, forming an advance troop, and literally flew down the curved road that at its bottom met a wooden bridge across a swift narrow stream.

This first party sped across, seeing nothing. But the alarm was up and before the second band reached it, three horsemen had emerged from the trees bordering the stream and set upon the riders, attacking them from the side. The shock of the flank attack carried Darcy and Rob dangerously near the frail railing of the bridge. Rob was furiously swinging his

heavy sword in wide curves to cover both himself and Darcy whose play was hampered by the twisting body of Roy Chester between him and his horse's head. With a cry of triumph the slender young Royalist freed his waist from Darcy's confining left arm and touched the rail with his left foot. Darcy tried to force his horse away from the edge but on his right Rob was plunging closer and closer to protect him.

Chester straightened his left leg. It raised him from the saddle. For just a second he stood poised and then flung himself into the air and disappeared with a great splash into the noisy muddy current below. Freed of the extra weight, the horse pushed off the mount of a dragoon trying to cut him off. Rob slashed the man's sword hand, forced his own steed up even with Darcy's, and with a backward sweep of his threatening sword cleared the space behind them.

"Ride!" he yelled to Darcy.

The dragoons were the less disposed to pursue as they had seen the prisoner make his escape. Their officer was saved, so they plunged along the stream to overtake him and give him aid.

Rangely and Morris were bitterly disappointed over the outcome of their raid and only the encouragement of Rob and Darcy kept them content to return to their garrison. They had failed to carry off their prize, but they had struck terror to the hearts of the

secure Royalists. They had killed one of their most trusted and successful generals and themselves had suffered no hurt. As for the escape of Roy Donald Chester, that meant nothing. No Commonwealth man, except Rob, had ever heard of him.

Rob was sunk deeper than ever in the mystery of his sister's disappearance. He hated to give up his belief that Chester was responsible, yet the young man's light conversation had given the air of truth to his denial. Rob on most matters would not have believed a single word of Tom Harrison's, but his statements had influenced Rob. In the long agonizing watches of their surrounded stronghold Rob again and again questioned Darcy.

"Did Harrison try to say anything while you were tying him up?"

"Nothing I could hear or remember now. Let me see," and little Darcy's face would screw up into a knot as he scratched his bullet-head. "Only word I can remember was *Gaffer,* I think. Would that be your grandfather, Rennie?"

"Gaffer? Perhaps Gaffer Warren. But what could Harrison mean by that?"

"Well, don't fret yourself over that. There's too much to think of here in this castle—such as it is. And I'm not sure the word was *Gaffer* after all."

Back in the quiet raided town the early morning wore on with accustomed drowsiness. The guards at the far end said nothing about their adventure to

their fellows in fear of punishment for their breaches of watchfulness. The riders who had the brush at the bridge with the escaping captors returned to town some two hours later without having found Chester,

and then their report was made to their own obscure officer.

A timid housewife hurrying down the village street was the first to see the rigid body of General Pomfret lying before the inn with his sword sticking straight up from his breast. She shrieked and immediately fainted. A crowd gathered and the first report was that she had run the general through the heart because of some unwelcome gallantry to her. The evi-

dent impossibility of such a punishment from a woman weak enough to faint after she had done a man to death did not stop the tongues from wagging.

When she revived, her own indignant story stopped that tale in some mouths, but for years afterwards she was secretly pointed out to strangers as the woman who—if she would tell—could relate a wonderful story of why and how she had killed one of the King's greatest generals.

Even the confused story of the amazed stable boy who had admitted the riders to the inn only made matters worse. The general dead in the street by his own sword? No noise? No other person who had seen the riders?

"Well," concluded the village writing master, "there be angels who fly unseen, and there be devils, too. And if this be not the work of the devil, I know naught, say I. Who can give a better reason?"

He swept the circle of his listeners with his stare. No one contradicted him, for he could read and write, and they were devilish practices also. He knew what he was talking about.

And so the wonder grew.

With the arrival of a few officers, the proceedings changed. They had their general's body carried into the inn parlor; then they mounted to his room to investigate. No townsman would have gone in there until after the village curate had cursed the evil spirits and driven them forth. But soldiers had little

care for good and evil, right and wrong, no matter what they were fighting for.

The cringing landlord—terrified at the report his inn would have as a resort for the devil—followed the officers at a respectful distance. Nothing in the general's room was disturbed. The mystery deepened.

"Perhaps the gentlemen should visit the aide's room—Mr. Chester's," the host suggested.

"Good idea!" In they trooped noisily. Here they came upon confusion.

"Some devil's work here, sure enough!" declared one.

"Oh, my beds!" wailed the poor owner, peeping around the soldiers.

They pushed him into the room.

"Pull off those bed clothes," one ordered him as all drew their swords and surrounded the pile.

"Oh, Sirs; I dare not!" he wailed, but the swords behind him were real and the strange pile on the far bed might be no more than his own property. Off came the mattress. Off came sheets. Off came covers.

"By my faith!" exclaimed an officer. "There's a form in the bed."

"It's twisted out of all shape! And it doesn't move," said another.

Terrible visions of some frightful monster hiding there in his bed ready to spring at him with tooth

and nail and then vanish in a puff of smoke up the chimney made the innkeeper stop and stretch out his arms to the officers. Rudely brushing past him, yet with swords pointed at the huddled shape, they feverishly tore off the remaining covers and pillows, and disclosed to their astonished gaze, not a devilish monster, but the terrified face and cramped body of the half-suffocated Tom Harrison. They hauled him out and unbound him.

"My pillow slips and sheets ruined," cried the host, his natural instinct coming to the top at once.

Thus it was the obscure Tom Harrison, butcher's son and attorney's clerk, mere quibbler over words and master of crabbed hen's strokes on parchment, who basked in the glory of rapt attention, as he gave the true account of the amazing occurrences of that early morning. His legal training had made him remember Darcy's name, too. When hours later the bedraggled Roy Donald Chester returned to town in a farmer's cart, none the worse for his plunge and vigorous swim, except that he was tired and his good clothes were spoiled beyond repair, he added a few more names.

The officers of the troops quartered in that town from then on became the most bitter against the Commonwealth Army shut up in Doncaster; the most staunch in insistence upon stern terms in every proposal to the governor for giving up the castle.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

LISTED FOR CAPTURE

It was only a few weeks later that the redoubled watchfulness of the besiegers became severe upon the garrison in the castle. Their attempts to break through the surrounding lines were less and less successful; their sallies were repulsed with greater fury; their messengers were discovered and captured; often executed upon the spot when papers were found on their bodies. Even three women who for months had easily made their way into the castle and out again were detained. They disappeared, and Rangely and Rob and Darcy never knew whether they had been imprisoned or hanged.

Food was getting lower and lower. A few reckless men got through the enemy's lines late one night and returned—that is, less than half of them did—the next day with good store of chickens and some fresh meat. Such expeditions were too costly to be risked often. If, of twenty who volunteered to go, only eight returned, there were fewer mouths to feed,

true; but there were fewer able-bodied soldiers to hold the castle against the bothersome attacks at every weak spot or to harass the enemy and so make him disposed to grant easier terms when the inevitable surrender had to be made.

For come it must. Even the strongest-hearted, the most reckless, the most stubborn had to admit that, though grudgingly.

Rob and Darcy were peeping from behind a projection above a gate one morning when a sharp ping and a shower of dust made both of them drop to their knees for protection.

"That was a close one," ejaculated Darcy.

"Too close for comfort," agreed Rob. "Where did it come from?"

"I'll see."

Darcy found a crack in the mortar between the stones and glued one eye to the narrow opening.

"I have it," he exclaimed excitedly. "That bush." He let Rob take a squint.

"That bush wouldn't conceal a man."

"No, not the bush," Darcy went on. "That's only to mask the shot the better. He's dug a hole behind it big enough to hold him, and he's shooting from the level of the ground."

"By shot and powder," Rob slapped his boot. "You're right. That's a new one. With that trick they can plant hundreds of sharpshooters anywhere

they choose. We won't be able to show our noses anywhere."

"Move along." Darcy pushed him. "I found that chink."

"Well?" Rob demanded after a long silence. "See anything?"

Darcy motioned him to silence.

"They can't hear what I'm saying," Rob protested.

"No. But you disturb me," Darcy complained.

"Well, what is it?" Rob applied his husky shoulder to Darcy's small weight and dispossessed him of the peep-hole. "Now, I'll tell you," he promised generously. "Can I believe my eyes?" he exclaimed wonderingly, while Darcy danced around him in consuming curiosity.

"What is it? Give me just one squint," he pleaded, acting like nothing so much as a clucking farmyard hen.

He could not budge the stocky Rob, who after a long look spoke.

"Look over the wall yourself. There'll be no shooting."

He stretched himself to his full height and leaned above the stones.

Along the dusty road leading straight from the Royalist headquarters rode a dozen men preceded by a gayly garbed herald bearing a white banner that curved and snapped in the sunlight.

"A parley!" cried Darcy.

"And terms," added Rob.

"Stiff ones, too."

"Well, we're not done for yet. Though I am sick of horse meat, and I should like some fresh vegetables again," remarked Rob.

Near a dismantled hut the Royalist party halted and waited for the Commonwealth party from the Castle. It was not long in making its appearance as imposing as it could and riding forth at a slow pace to meet the envoys. It walked its horses. The Royalists must not think that Commonwealth men were anxious to know the terms of their surrender. They could be reserved and brave up to the last gasp.

In spite of all their loyalty and pride for their army and their cause, Rob and Darcy could not fail to notice the difference between the two sets of messengers.

The Royalist horses were sleek and groomed, with arched necks and graceful legs. The Commonwealth horses were skinny in the shoulders and sagging in the backs. The Royalists wore brilliant cloaks and fine small clothes. Their Commonwealth officers were dull and poverty-stricken in their coarse brown suits and scanty shoulder capes. The Royalist grooms wore liveries. The castle grooms were in rags. The horses cared for by the attendants on the opposing side might next week be drawing beautiful ladies to the concert, or bearing titled gentlemen to the hunt.

The Commonwealth nags next week might be appearing as roast or stew upon the garrison tables.

"They make a good showing," Darcy was forced to admit.

"Pretty popinjays!" Rob retorted.

"That's why we're the better fighters."

"It's plain we have to be," Rob put the whole significance of the national struggle in that short sentence.

The parley in the hut lasted only a few minutes. The officers reappeared and mounted. There were military salutes on each side, and the groups parted.

"As soon as that white flag disappears, drop behind the wall," suggested Rob.

"Now!" cried Darcy as the flag in the distance was furled.

The two watchers were not a second too soon. There was a sharp ring on the stone, a little flicker of particles, and a piece as large as Rob's thumb fell from the place where his neck had been resting against the edge.

"That fellow can shoot," was Darcy's compliment.

"Let's get a musket and send him an invitation to dance," Rob proposed.

Their intention was cut short, however, by the rolling drum that called all officers to council.

As he took his seat near the lower end of the long table, Rob glanced at the folded parchments lying before the governor's chair. There were the fatal

terms that meant life or death, release or captivity to so many men. He wondered whether their latest sallies had so affected the Royalist forces that the terms would be light; or whether the slaying of General Pomfret had made the terms severe. What for himself? He dismissed that thought. He was too unimportant to be mentioned except as among the general troopers. A month from now, where should he be leading his men? Really leading them somewhere, he hoped, not keeping them shut up in castle walls like squirrels in a cage.

The governor entered and the men rose to attention until he took his seat.

The governor's remarks on their condition and the position of the Royalists brought nods of understanding from them.

"The King's men feel that we must yield at last to hunger. Our sallies have cost them many men, but cost more of our own. You know they have taken most of our messengers, even the two women who helped us most with their reports. You may know we had some firm friends in the ministers of the churches near here. Colonel Robbins told me they have made prisoners of all of them and sent them to the Tower of London."

A murmur of interest and regret swept around the table.

"So Colonel Robbins came to parley an hour ago."

The governor paused to note the effect of his

words. Not a man moved, not a face changed. Turning to his chief aide, the governor invited a remark from him.

"Did you tell the Royalist colonel that we have provisions yet for a long time? That we dare die? That we shall sell our lives at as dear a price as we can?"

"All that and more. But I could not keep his staff from looking at our horses."

"What was his answer, if we may hear it?"

"He admitted our gallantry and said he wished to preserve the lives of as many as is in his power."

The governor paused again. The men hardly dared to breathe. They knew that the terms of their surrender of the castle had not yet been revealed to them.

What could this mean?

The governor swept his eyes around the table. Then he cleared his throat.

"I repeated my wish that all our men be granted their lives and free passage through the enemy lines. Colonel Robbins said he could grant this for nearly all. But there are some things he cannot do for himself. The King's orders have tied his hands. He believes that these men concerned are the bravest of all amongst us."

There was a slight motion as he paused again.

"So from the general free passage he has to omit a few of us." The governor kept his eyes fixed on the

paper before him. "He must require that some of us be given up to him. In fact:—six of us."

The officers drew in their breath sharply. Six? Which six? Why?

The governor picked up a small piece of paper.

"These men," he resumed, "have the honor to be considered so powerful and dangerous by the King's staff, to have injured his cause so seriously. They are a glorious credit to us and a shining example for bravery and loyalty to our cause. This exception made of them raises them higher than any ribbon or star or title or wealth that any earthly monarch could bestow. They are Danvers, Ludlow, Morris, Darcy, Rangely, Rennie."

Very wisely at that moment the governor left his chair to speak to an aide at the door, so the officers were unrestrained in their shouts of applause at the effect of their comrades' unequaled deed in killing the enemy general. To be listed in the terms of surrender of such a castle meant undying fame to them and their families.

"How did they get all the names?"

Rangely scratched his pate, raised his eyes, and turned to Rob.

"Chester had an aide who knows me. He likely heard Darcy's name too."

Rangely nodded.

"And that fine young fellow who made the dive likely heard the others."

"All except yours, Rangely," cried a friend. "You're well known to all the King's staff."

Rangely was a grizzled soldier with experience in the Low Countries and the West Indies; but Rob was no more than a boy, and the tributes paid to him now made him flush like any girl. Next instant the sobering thought of what it would mean to be handed over to the army of Colonel Robbins swept over him and the blush of pleasure gave way to a serious stare. Yet there were always chances of escape. Why, young Chester, so secure on Darcy's horse, had slipped away with no more inconvenience than a ducking and a buffeting swim.

The governor had returned to his chair. His face was serious, but those closest to him could tell from his eyes that he was pleased at the applause given his six heroes.

"From this one point I could not shake Colonel Robbins. Shall we hand over these six comrades to the King willingly?"

"No!" came the shout that echoed among the ceiling timbers.

"I knew your temper. So I arranged that these terms are to be in force for the next six days, no matter what we may feel we have to do. And Robbins—he's a gallant officer, men—agreed to the six days. Now what shall we do?"

"Sally every day and night and let these six es-

cape," came the shout from those who knew something of the strategy of warfare.

"Right!" approved the governor. "Now, these are the plans."

At the end of the conference lots were drawn, and Ludlow and Rangely were designated to make the first break for freedom.

They dared not suppose that after agreeing to such a game, Colonel Robbins would deliberately allow six men marked for capture to slip through his lines. The sentries outside the castle were doubled; sharpshooters became more accurate; more trenches were dug; more troops were ordered up; and the watch began.

That same day, the Commonwealth garrison appeared outside the walls twice but retired both times without charging, the officers deciding that the renewed alertness of the King's men would sacrifice too many of their small force. Next morning, at the time of the changing of the guards, they made a sudden sally of all their number in a different place from where they had appeared the day before. Unexpected at this point, they easily routed the King's soldiers from their post and drove them back into their main camp. Thereupon troops poured in upon them from three sides and they, having lost some men and inflicted losses upon the Royalists, were driven back and into castle walls.

At the roll call the dead and wounded were accounted for. Ludlow and Rangely had escaped!

For two entire days the garrison remained quiet, nor was there any attack from the besiegers. Colonel Robbins might be bound as a soldier to the King's orders to secure those six men, but he certainly was acting like a gentleman in giving them every fair chance to save themselves. On the evening of the fourth day, when there was still enough light for persons familiar with the land to make their way safely, the garrison issued forth again, this time as stealthily as possible. At the first skirmish the alarm was spread, and because of the coming darkness, the fight was bitter and fierce.

Danvers and Morris were to make their escape this night and were edging their horses off to the right from the general scrimmage, while Rob and Darcy were flanking them to hold off any of the King's chargers. Danvers got clear first and disappeared behind a hedge. Morris was seeking in the gathering twilight for a similar break when his horse, thrown by a misstep or struck by a bullet, went crashing to the ground.

Darcy and Rob saw him fall at the same instant.

"He's down!" Darcy cried to Rob. "Ride away yourself." He struck Rob's horse with the flat of his sword and the steed bounded toward the hedge. Rob regained control of him after a few jumps and drew

him beside the struggling Morris whose boot was pinioned beneath his own disabled steed.

"To your feet," Rob called to him. Morris drew his leg from the boot.

"Ride!" he yelled to Rob, seeing that the latter's horse was still on his feet.

For answer, Rob slid to the ground beside him, and dropped his reins across his wrist.

"Now's your chance. Mount!" he directed and doubling his body, he began to lope back across the fields toward the castle, skirting the struggling clumps of men, afraid to fire his pistols lest he wound a comrade.

At roll call when Darcy saw Rob before his thinned company he forgot discipline and blurted out:

"Hey! You here? Didn't I tell you to ride away?"

Rob paid no attention to him—*then.*

So costly in lives of common soldiers had these two skirmishes been that Rob and Darcy (as well as many others) looked sadly on the tired, ill-clad, poorly fed survivors and began to count the cost. Had they the right to save themselves at the risk and destruction of so many other men? Darcy was especially downcast, though he blamed all his ill humor on Rob who foolishly had not escaped when he had had so good a chance and above all had been ordered by Darcy himself to ride off. Much as Rob argued with him, he refused to be convinced that Rob had been right.

"We can't ask these men to lay down their lives for us—at least I can't," he wound up gloomily.

"Nor I," Rob agreed. "Think of the friends who've been killed or wounded in these days. Let's talk to the governor."

He started off, followed by the diminutive Darcy, still mumbling to himself and shaking his head like a faithful but protesting spaniel.

For two days the garrison gave no outward sign of life, though within the walls there was great rejoicing that the siege was over, and they might march forth safely, and disperse to their own homes.

On the morning of the sixth day, the governor sent his messenger to Colonel Robbins that he was prepared to surrender according to the terms agreed upon, and that if the King's officer should find among his forces any of the six men whose names he had excepted from the safe conduct, he should take them into his own army as prisoners.

When the Royalist Army had been drawn up outside the main gate, every inhabitant of the castle was mustered in the great court and the lists and rolls were handed by the governor to the aide of Colonel Robbins.

The governor spoke pleasantly:

"But you will not find your six captives, Colonel."

"I'm certain they are here," the King's officer replied.

But they were not. Neither roll call, nor list;

neither questioning nor diligent search could produce one of the half dozen. Round and about went the puzzled aides; over and over again sounded the names.

Colonel Robbins looked as if he would like to scratch his head in bewilderment, but military dignity prevented him. The governor watched him, a pleased smile playing over his countenance.

"I can understand that some of these six could escape at your sallies," the colonel told the governor. "But not all of them. You came out only twice."

The governor nodded. "Only twice," he agreed.

If Colonel Robbins had scrutinized closely the faces of the Commonwealth Army's officers every time they heard the names of Darcy and Rob Rennie called he might have discovered on them a look as bewildered and puzzled as the expression on his own.

They knew that Ludlow and Rangely had escaped in the first skirmish, that Danvers and Morris had ridden away in the second—Morris on Rob Rennie's horse. Since then they had seen Darcy and Rennie about the officers' quarters.

Yet today—the day of the surrender—they could not be found.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ROB AND DARCY DISAPPEAR

It was an old stowaway trick that Rob had earlier told briefly to Darcy, now recalled by the little fellow, that the two suggested to the governor as their best means for safety. It was so plainly unfair to risk the lives of many good men to save the lives of these two alone. So confident were the two schemers that, except for some slight inconvenience, they would be safer under their arrangement and more certain of final freedom that the governor, doubting at first and still not assured at the end of the interview, gave a hesitating consent.

Thus it was that the mustered garrison which Colonel Robbins inspected did not contain the two men for whom he was most signally responsible. Nor could his diligent searchers, poking into every room, every nook, and every cranny of the old castle, come upon any trace of them. He was forced to report the first four men as "escaped," and although he felt the other two simply could not have eluded his troops he was compelled to order the same word to be entered after the names of Dick Darcy and Robert Rennie.

The castle had been silent for hours and the setting

sun was casting pink glows through all the openings facing the west when Rob rose to his feet, stretched himself comfortably, and remarked in a low tone to the lounging Darcy, "There's the end of the first day."

Darcy's only reply was a contented grunt as he drew up his legs to give Rob more room for pacing.

The garrison and all its dependents had marched forth from the castle; the victorious army had finished its rounds and had retired to its camp for the night; and Rob and Darcy were the only inhabitants of the venerable rugged pile which for centuries had dominated that district.

Age and the hardships of war had tumbled some portions of its many angles, walls, projections, towers, arches, and corners to the ground. Stones—singly and in piles—lay about. No one knew the number of halls, chambers, stables, prisons, and storerooms the mass contained.

It had been an easy thing to find a platform near the ground facing the west. Darcy had hit on that scheme.

"We can see the sunlight then at least once every day, and if it comes at evening, it will help us count the days as they pass."

Outside the regular wall, taking advantage of a deep angle, a small room had easily been walled up. Three masons and three true soldiers had finished it quickly within a day and part of one night. First,

into the space was carried enough water and food for thirty days for two men. Straw was their bedding. The space was long and so narrow that if a builder had taken careful measurements, he would have said only that the castle wall at that place was unusually thick. If one man drew himself up against one end, there was space enough for the other to stretch his legs.

Under Darcy's directions—he came from the poor quarters of the most crowded streets of London—the masons piled the stones and filled in the mortar loosely, so that air circulated and light penetrated. Along the top edge of the wall beneath the sloping roof and hidden from sight by its overhanging line were long open slots through which the skinny Darcy could worm one of his arms.

"To feel the sun," he explained.

Into that prison—or safety chamber—the robust Rob and the little Darcy clambered over the wall breast high, and chatted with the workmen while the stones mounted higher and higher and their friends departed, leaving the two more deserted than any adventurers of a forlorn hope raid could ever be.

How long would they be confined? Food and water for thirty days? And then? Rob forced his thoughts away from the picture. He looked at the impassive face of his active companion. Would this almost solitary confinement prey on his mind? How would he act? Men shut up in the Tower of London

had gone mad, Rob knew. He had seen one, not mad, but lost, stumbling along like a brainless child through the streets of London when after years he had been released and a rejoicing rabble had escorted him to what had been his home.

How would Darcy act? Was Darcy thinking these same things of Rob? He stole a side glance at the dark mass of Darcy's body trying to get the feel of all the little sunlight that filtered through and guessed that Darcy was stealing a look at him.

"Don't mind me, Rob," he spoke slowly. "I'm not losing my wits. It's only that I like the feel of the sun on my hands and face after the gray damp of this narrow place all day. I won't grow violent while you're asleep and crack your skull for you."

Rob choked a hearty laugh.

"I've no fear of you. Do you think I will?"

"Not you. You're quick-tempered, but beside me, you're steady and slow."

The sunlight receded; the twilight deepened; darkness advanced; and the short summer night of northern England began.

These quiet hours before total darkness were the most delightful for the two men. All day long, with the danger of prowling Royalists poking about the castle, they remained quiet, not daring then even to sleep lest loud regular breathing or trumpeting snores disclose their presence. But at night they could hear the soldiers and workers move; from the

stone courts and passages they could follow their movements to the packed dirt road outside, then as some of them turned aside they could hear their voices trail away in different directions. They could even distinguish the solitary walker by the swish of the grass in the field.

One. Two. Three. The days went slowly by.

On the fourth day a terrific crash roused Rob from a deep sleep, but before he could make a sound, the agile Darcy had clapped his hand over Rob's mouth. All that day they listened to the crumble, the rumble, and the crash of falling roofs and toppling walls. Rafters and floors went smashing into holes below. Ceilings slid off into the courtyard. Heavy timbers groaned from their sockets in relief at giving up the strain of centuries. Towers toppled to the delighted shouts of sappers and pioneers. Clouds of dust puffed high in the air as if in delight that the somber old castle was rocking and tumbling at last.

Rob and Darcy knew what was happening.

Often when the Commonwealth Army had captured a castle, Cromwell had ordered its destruction. Not again could any Royalist force enter it and man it against his hosts. So England was dotted with the towering ruins of the once overbearing dwellings of feudal lords and barons.

"What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander," Darcy remarked in a whisper during the tumult by putting his lips close to Rob's ear.

Rob nodded and replied:

"Old Doncaster will never house another of our garrisons. Too bad!"

"We're still in possession of our stronghold," Darcy reminded him. "So long as we're here, this belongs to the Commonwealth Party."

"See here," Rob suddenly began that evening. "If all the walls are coming down, what about us? Crushed here like flies in a schoolboy's trap?"

Darcy took his time to reply.

"I've seen old houses torn down in London. And the walls fall at angles. So if one of these falls against the other there'll still be room at the bottom for us."

"Small comfort for me," Rob complained. "You're skinny. But I'll be flattened like a flounder."

"What's a flounder?" Darcy asked innocently.

And while Rob related everything he knew about that kind of fish and several others, his mind was kept away from falling walls. No doubt this was Darcy's intention when he asked the question.

It was nerve-racking and mind-torturing to sit there through all that confusion and not make a dash for freedom. As Darcy had predicted, Rob was the quick-tempered one. He became the more restless. Darcy became more and more talkative, always with the thought of distracting the larger man's mind.

Rob wished to push out the last stone the masons had forced in without mortar, so that the prisoners could begin to make their way out the more speedily

and easily. Darcy took possession of the short iron crowbar and jestingly threatened to crack Rob's head with it if he didn't lie down and go to sleep for the night.

Rob never knew it but Darcy lay on that bar all night long and not once let himself drop to sleep.

All next day a swirling breeze drove dust and sand and pebbles into their retreat until their bodies were caked, their skins whitened, and their eyes blistered. That night Rob was sullenly dangerous. Darcy could appease him only by letting him have the bar but on solemn promise that he would only dig out mortar from the inside of the wall. He would force no stone from its place until Darcy would agree that the time

had come for their attempt to gain their freedom.

"Nine!" groaned Rob the next evening as the sunset glow and the quiet told them another day had gone.

That night Darcy had nothing to fear. Rob, worn out with anxiety, slept heavily from dark to dawn. Darcy had to shake him lustily.

"Listen!" he whispered as Rob lazily opened his eyes. As usual his hand was close above Rob's lips to stifle any outcry.

No sound could have been sweeter to those two cramped and soiled men than what the morning silence let reach them:—the far-away trumpets assembling the Royalist Army to march away. Tears rolled down Darcy's wrinkled face.

"That dust still hurts my eyes," he said, getting to his feet to strain his sight at a chink, hoping against all probability to catch a glimpse of the departing army.

All day in the silence of the grave that reigned in the ruined castle they talked of their night's work.

"I wish we could let them know we were here all these days," Darcy exclaimed.

"We can. You have your orange scarf?"

"That I have."

Darcy drew from his breast the stringy draggled color mark of the Commonwealth Army and smoothed it out.

"We can't mark it," he objected.

"Of course we can," Rob corrected him. "Sweep up a little pile of that gray dust in the corner. Reach me that half-emptied flask of wine. Put stones to hold the scarf flat."

He poured a few drops over the gray dust, mixed it with his finger and began to mark the cloth.

In turn all day they worked with fingers and crowbar, careful to force no stone to fall on the outside lest some chance neighbor see it drop and come to investigate. They could hardly sit still as the sun went down. As soon as the twilight was deep enough they dislodged the keystone of their passageway to the open air. Then one by one in rapid succession the bowlders slid from their places and thudded on the ground. Gradually the opening marked by the evening sky grew larger until even Rob's bulky girth could pass through it.

They paused for a last look round their tiny chamber.

"Good-by, old Doncaster!" Rob made the pile a mock bow.

"Our farewell note!" cried Darcy, retrieving it from the floor. "Where shall we put it?"

"Flat on the ground outside. It won't attract attention too soon. That orange's a gaudy color."

Rob squeezed through the aperture and stretched himself pleasantly to his full height. Darcy slipped out and stood beside him, taking deep breaths of the night air.

THEY LISTENED FOR A FEW SECONDS TO THE QUIET SOUNDS OF THE NIGHT AND PICKED THEIR WAY CAREFULLY AMONG THE STONES ON THE SIDE OF THE SLOPE

"Here's a good level space," he said.

They spread the orange strip flat and weighted it with several stones, listened for a few seconds to the quiet sounds of the night, picked their way carefully among the stones on the side of the slope, clambered up the far boundary, noticed the lights of a distant village, and plunged through the meadow land to avoid for that night all chances of meeting curious strangers and to put as much distance between them and Doncaster as freed strong legs could. At dawn they bathed in a wooded stream, on whose banks they concealed themselves all day.

Several days later a chance visitor to the castle came upon the orange scarf, faded by sun and soiled by rain, but still bearing the lines of the letters traced by Rob's fingers. It was another fortnight before the interesting rag came into the hands of Colonel Robbins. When he made out its message he slapped his thigh and guffawed like a bull.

"Brave fellows, all of them, and they outwitted all of us. I'm glad they got away. They were there all the time, yet we never suspected. Ten days after we took possession of the castle."

This is what he read:

"Darcy & Rennie Stayed Here Till Aug. 28."

Then he turned to the surrounding officers and asked seriously, "How many of us would willingly be walled up in an enemy castle for the sake of the King?"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

LOBSTERS ONCE MORE

Darcy, like all men bred in the city, soon grew bored with his uneventful cross-country tramp with a single companion. In vain Rob tried to keep him absorbed in the sights and sounds, the probabilities of whether the next hamlet would give them food and shelter or set the dogs on them. To this second he would reply gloomily:

"Now in London, I'd be sure of food and shelter without walking so far for it."

Rob tried to make attractive the excitement of their march, but Darcy could find something much more thrilling in the commonplaces of crowded streets and pavements.

"If it's excitement I'm wanting, that I can always get at the corner dram shop," he would complain.

This homesickness for the city was as real in this wiry strong little man as yearning for his mother could be in a child. Rob was disappointed, but not astonished when Darcy announced that he must "get home." He had been silent, almost bad-tempered all one clear night as they covered a long distance toward the southwest and when they threw themselves down

in the center of a deep wood at sunrise, Rob felt that he was seeing his peculiar friend for the last time. He surprised him looking carefully at the rising sun and the trees about them as though to fix distinctly

the points of the compass in his eye. Rob felt that he was making up his mind to strike off boldly toward the southeast and get to London in as few days as his twinkling legs could carry him.

As the light faded early in that shaded place that afternoon, Rob rolled over, then sat upright, and cast a rapid look around. He had been right. No hud-

dled form was near him. Darcy had gone, sparing the feelings of both of them the pangs of leave-taking. Rob knew that he would miss the little fellow's active ways, but he also knew that alone he could make much better time in covering long distances and that he could more boldly travel now by day and even risk an occasional stay at an inn. And if danger threatened he could always try to be a Dutch seaman again, a thing utterly impossible when Darcy, that unmistakable product of the London streets, was present.

Rob's first news of the Commonwealth cause was disheartening. Never since their struggle for the liberties of Englishmen had begun had their fortunes sunk so low. The country in which Rob was making his way had been thrilled by the escapade of their raid on the general's bedroom and his killing. That deed made every Royalist hesitate; made every Roundhead confident. Then what had occurred?

The very men who had bearded the lion in his den had been shut up in their own castle and forced to surrender.

"Didn't some of them get away?" Rob asked in broken English, with a stupid stare.

"We've been told so," said the hostler, "but I know what war stories are in these days. They tell some cock-and-bull yarn about two of them being walled up in the castle and getting out later. That's

a likely one!" He hobbled off to his steeds in the low stable.

Rob drew in his breath.

"Must be careful of what I say!" he ordered himself, for he had almost contradicted the hostler's unbelief.

Royalist forces seemed able to do anything they attempted to do. One leader with a large army had in broad view of all the district marched through the straggling Commonwealth men near the city and had joined his Royal Master in the city of Oxford. The Commonwealth city—considered as firm as a mountain cliff—had been captured easily by the King's troops. From London came news that so disheartened were the people's leaders in Parliament that they were willing to sue for a peace and so end the Civil War.

Rob was disposed to believe the worst. Hadn't his closest comrade refused to rejoin his troop and gone off on a wild goose chase to his home in London?

Rob was slightly undecided in his own thoughts. Should he press on to try to gain his company once more or should he let discretion be his guide and return to his home and bend all his efforts to solving the problem of Prue's disappearance? Then there passed before his eyes the earliest laughable figures of the terrible Lobsters, the scattering of the people's enemies before their charges, the patient face of the long-suffering Governor of Doncaster, the stern

countenance of Haselrig, the dark brows of the invincible Cromwell himself, and he shook his head like a determined bulldog and decided to find his company and fight on—though it be only to a speedy end—for the relief of his people from oppression and the freedom of his country from a tyrant.

Then came another proof of the saying that "if the Commonwealth Army did nothing they could still win victories by the blunders of the Royalists."

The King, against all reason and commonsense, fought the Battle of Naseby.

Two days before the engagement Rob had fallen in with marching soldiers whom he joined at once. Having come up from London, they considered him a raw recruit and were astonished when, upon arrival near Leicester, he calmly announced he was going to rejoin his old regiment—the Lobsters.

As he moved from place to place, making inquiries, Rob was caught up by the bustling excitement that prevailed. The King was on the march from Leicester toward Oxford. He had left so many in the first city, and so many had run away from his army with plunder, that he had scarcely thirty-five hundred foot soldiers. His cavalry from the North was disgruntled. It wished to return home. Yet the King dared not move northward for fear of the Scottish Army against him. If the Commonwealth Army was so dispirited, the Royalist officers argued, this was the time to find it out and crush it forever.

For five days King and army waited, not able to learn where the main Commonwealth Army was, when out of clear sky came the thunder-clap—the Roundheads' General was quartered within only six miles of the King himself.

With the armies in this posture, Rob finally found his old company camped in an open field at the edge of a thin copse. In spite of himself, he broke into a run to join them. At a distance he was recognized with a cheer, but the first face he distinguished was the puckered-up one of Darcy.

"You here?" called Rob, pulling up short. "How's your dear old London?"

"Didn't see it," Darcy muttered, adding more folds and wrinkles to his skin, as he always did when he tried to smile or cover embarrassment.

"We wouldn't let him," Rangely spoke, coming forward with Morris. "We went there from Doncaster. On the way back we met little Darcy beating the road, so we brought him back with us."

"That's all," admitted Darcy, and this time his laugh cackled good-naturedly.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BATTLES AND BLUNDERS

THE King's staff of officers had sent out a Scout Master to learn of the position of the Commonwealth Army. This man, expert in his special field of army service, should have been—at this critical juncture—certain to make no error in his observations and careful to overlook no detail concerning the enemy. Like many supposedly faithful servants of the King, he was, however, not too thorough in the discharge of his duty. The day was hot, the way was long. He

rode not nearly far enough, but returned with the word that he had ridden for miles round, but could not discover or hear anything of the Commonwealth Army.

At this encouraging report the hot-headed Prince Rupert advanced with a party of horsemen and musketeers to pursue them. Even when he came to a position where he could see the enemy moving, he saw so indistinctly, or looked so hastily, that he mistook entirely the direction in which the men were moving. Elated, he sent word to the King that the whole Royalist Army should march up to him.

The King complied with this request at once, giving up on so slight a message the advantage of the high ground he had chosen, land on which all his troops had been carefully stationed, a field of battle on which he could hardly have failed to be victorious.

Thus, before the battle began, the King's side had made three capital blunders.

Riotously dashing beyond control of their officers, the King's force threw themselves upon the nearest Commonwealth troops before the Royalist cannon had been drawn up and trained upon their enemy. On that side the King's men, impetuous as a mountain torrent, carried all before them and captured six cannon within a few minutes after the battle had begun at ten in the morning. The King's footmen marched steadily and after one round of shot fell to

briskly with their swords and the butts of their muskets.

So sudden was the rush of all this portion of the King's Army that even the famous Lobsters were forced back against all the efforts of their officers to make them stand their ground. Up and down their heavy horses plunged, grinding flank against flank, rubbing leather boot against leather boot; crowding, rearing, snorting, whinnying, crashing to the earth with a shock of the heavy body and the clang of arms and armor; their riders urging, calling; guiding with reins, shouts, knees, and spurs; swinging their swords right and left and up and down in the air, always with some swish of a slashed body or the thud of a sledge-hammer blow on some enemy or his horse.

All the dash and fire were on the side of the King. All the bulldog endurance was on the side of the Commonwealth. But dash and fire were gaining.

Then a great cheer went up from the King's Army in this part of the field. The Commonwealth soldiers were breaking their ranks, turning back, and fleeing as fast as their legs or the legs of their steeds could carry them.

Untried troops were panic-stricken. But the Lobsters knew that few battles are decided in the first charge, so though they fell back more rapidly now they kept their mass compact, and held one ear and eye ready for their leader's orders. Riding diagonally across the field, old Haselrig skillfully drew his

men from the retreating mass, and by making a sharp curve, led them up to the vast body under the invincible Cromwell himself, just getting in motion to receive the shock of five bodies sweeping up a hill under command of the Royalist Langdale. The seven bodies of Commonwealth troops moved slowly until the Royalist force, like a mighty ocean wave on a jagged rock, split itself on the solid front of cavalry, and as a broken wave retreats to the ocean again, so did the fragments of that advance retire.

Nor could these flying fragments ever make one solid body again, so closely and fiercely were they pursued by half of Cromwell's division.

This close pursuit had a greater effect than any Cromwellian would have prayed for. Still in reserve were the large numbers of the King's guard with Charles himself at their head. Word had reached Rob that His Majesty was there upon that little rising spot and he wondered whether he should look upon the man again as he had that memorable day before the walls of Hull. Rob wished he could get an opportunity to defy the tyrant and oppressor as the governor of that city had on that occasion—now so long ago.

As he glanced at the imposing mass of men and horse as he rode after a fleeing half dozen unhorsed cavalrymen, he saw a commotion among them. One horse—he believed it was the King's—began to rear and plunge furiously. Others near it became dis-

turbed. A sympathetic ripple of annoyance ran through the troop; then without any warning, as if a panic of fear had possessed them, they began to turn and fly. The disorder was the stranger because no Commonwealth officer had dreamed of giving any order to attack that party yet, rather expecting that it would dash down the slopes, stop, rally, and reenforce its only fleeing comrades.

This blunder—for blunder it certainly was—almost made them forget the tasks they had in hand. They could have ceased military operations at once and held a service of rejoicing upon the still troubled battlefield. Rob could see that the rider next the King seized the reins of his charger and turned that steed with his as they dashed away.

Then came—as the Lobsters had foreseen—the test of both armies. Not who can cause the other side to scatter first wins the day, but he who can recover and hold his ground longest. It was observed over and over again that though the King's troops prevailed in charges and routed those companies on whom they flung themselves, they did not rally themselves in good order; nor could they be brought to make a second charge the same day. On the contrary, after Cromwell had trained the Commonwealth Army, whether they prevailed at first or whether they were beaten or routed, they soon turned and stood in battle array until they received new orders.

So now, although Prince Rupert returned from

his brilliant charge flushed with success and loaded with the booty of war, his men could not be gathered around him again. They too were intent upon the booty of war whenever they could find it. Prince and King, with danger of their persons, ordered and shouted and rode in vain. Nothing could now stop the slow steady sweep across the field of the troops marked by the orange colors of the Commonwealth Army. Bowing his head and waving a despairing hand, the King rode from the field, leaving behind him as prisoners most of his foot soldiers, and as booty his cannon and baggage. Most important among his effects was his private chest containing his most secret papers and all the letters between the Queen and him.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

ROB MEETS CHESTER AGAIN

The King and his horse troops had abandoned on the field of battle all their arms and stores, but it must not be supposed that every Royalist turned and fled when his master did. Long after the main troops had ceased active fighting and were engaged in pursuit, all about the wide stretch of land individuals fought to retain their arms; or to make their escape, or to save themselves from being made prisoners on any except honorable and safe terms.

The pile of baggage provided a ready-made breastwork to a group of such detached bitter-end soldiers. Around it horse and foot of the Commonwealth galloped and crawled, endeavoring to dislodge the whole party of gallant and desperate defenders, or to separate a few individuals who might then be dealt with more directly.

Rob and Danvers, cantering slowly back from an unsuccessful attempt to overtake a half dozen fleeing riders whose horses, swords, and armor they wanted, saw this active small eddy of the main current of the day's battle.

"Booty and cannon!" cried Danvers, swerving to

the left and pushing Rob's horse in the same direction.

"Why aren't more of our men there," Rob asked angrily, "instead of chasing men they can't catch?"

"As we were doing," Danvers reminded him.

The struggle between the sweating gentlemen trying to save what their blundering King had risked and lost and the victorious Roundheads was so unequal that Danvers and Rob might have done nothing except watch. But as they checked their steeds, a young gentleman as gracefully as if he were chasing a fox across fields made his horse clear an overturned cannon, stop just long enough to let an aide grasp his stirrup, and then dash for freedom, dragging the man on foot at incredible speed.

Danvers was watching another part of the moiling mass of men, cannons, chests, bundles, swords, pistols, and muskets and only knew what Rob meant after he had heard his muttered:

"Not yet!"

Rob spurred to intercept the rider, whose steed, not used in the fatigue of battle, was still fresh. Fortunately, he had to cross Rob's path; but seeing the latter start, he had time to draw his bright sword and flourish it at Rob's charger. The young man was riding at a disadvantage, for closely clasped against his body under his left arm was a small roll wrapped in oiled leather. The aide flying at his side likewise carried a leather roll. Rob knew when he saw these

cases for valuable papers that these two men must not escape.

In the few seconds of pursuit, Rob measured the horse of his doomed prisoner with a judging eye and quickly compared his own mount. The Royalist's horse was slightly built but strong. Unencumbered by the runner at his side he could have flown like the wind. Rob's charger was slower in motion, awkward-looking, heaving in the neck and shoulders; built like a battering-ram to shock brutally into the shoulders of enemy cavalry mounts; firm to withstand such hammering against his own chest. The other horse was groomed and polished to a shimmer. Rob's burly animal was foam-flecked and dirt-spotted. Rob's saddle was dark and greasy. The nobleman's leather was tooled and colored fantastically.

"Lady's furniture!" Rob thought contemptuously.

Then the beauty and grace of the fleeing rider and his steed—so perfectly matched, so harmonious in all their movements—struck into his envy for a second. He almost wished he could dress so well, ride so gracefully, and own things so costly. Only for a second, however, did these thoughts cross his cavalryman's mind. He spurred and spurred again; and called and coaxed his loyal old nag.

The courtier knew he was marked for pursuit. Casting a disdainful glance at the hulk heaving toward him and judging the distance, he plucked his wide feathered hat from his head and with a quick

twist of his right wrist sent it skimming from his hand. To Rob this gesture meant nothing, but when the strange object struck his horse squarely over the eyes and the beast reared and plunged and kicked, Rob realized that he was dealing with more than a painted and prancing weakling of the King's dissolute household.

He had fallen behind a few yards.

"You popinjay!" thought Rob. "You can't do that again, anyway!"

Rob would have fired had his pistols not been empty. For a second he wondered whether he could fling one of them at the blond head and knock the rider from his saddle. He gave up the plan. If he hit the horse the blow would only increase his lightning pace.

"If I could only hit the horse in the eye!" But Rob knew there were a thousand chances against his doing that. A glance behind reassured him that Danvers was following as rapidly as he could.

The courtier leaned over to speak to his agonized aide. Rob could not see the look in the latter's eyes, but it must have been a cross between relief at freedom from this killing run and terror at being left to the rage of the Roundheads. If that was what they were going to do! Rob bent over his horse's neck, patted it, spoke to it, urged it on.

He was right.

The aide took his hand from the stirrup strap and

turned head over heels several times along the ground, then lay quite still, the leather case protruding upwards from his arm.

"Like a spar to mark a sunken rock," thought Rob.

He pointed to the still figure to make Danvers responsible for seizing him and his possessions.

Released from the dragging weight, the fleeing horse had dashed forward, but Rob still had the advantage of the short diagonal course. It was clear that they must meet unless some miracle intervened.

"Why doesn't the Royalist draw his sword?" Rob wondered as he saw that they were bound to come together. With a sense of fairness, Rob let his saber rest in its scabbard. If the young fop preferred to be tumbled—horse and rider together—to the ground instead of defending himself with his weapon, it was his own look-out. Rob was willing to meet him on any terms he chose.

He gathered himself for the shock. His horse's shoulders were going to crash into the rump of the smaller steed and crash with such a force that it would go rolling over and over exactly as the running aide had rolled.

Rob did not know it, but his position was being observed by the other man's ear and eye, and by every instinct of the horse itself.

The courtier spoke a command, turned his reins, plunged his spurs deep—and there was no horse there for Rob's steed to crash.

As though by some diabolical power that other steed seemed to grow shorter before Rob's eyes. Its body contracted. Its back arched. Its hind legs sprang towards its middle. Its haunches were drawn up into its body.

Rob was more than mystified. He was spellbound as his horse plunged past in the open air. His temper was not made any calmer by a laughing chuckle from the tricky horseman.

Years later Rob learned the secret of this maneuver found only in horses trained in Portugal and Spain by masters of the bull-fighting arenas. These steeds are like none others on earth. A rider, if a bull charges at their haunches, waits until the horns are less than twelve inches distant from his steed's thighs. Then he commands, and the horse performs this astounding leap, drawing hind legs and haunches so far out of the way that he actually seems to grow shorter before the staring eyes of the spectators in the ring. As the bull's broad shoulders pass under the steed's haunches, the Portuguese sportsman leans back and with a graceful movement of his right arm plants a short barbed dart in the bull's flesh. At each succeeding passage, a shorter dart is used until the last that pricks the infuriated bull's flesh is no longer than a man's hand.

None of this knowledge would have compensated Rob at the time for his amazement when he found himself—instead of watching a fallen enemy strug-

gling to free himself from beneath a rolling horse and yielding himself a prisoner—tugging at the reins of his galloping horse to turn him once more to the chase.

Rob knew he could never overtake that wonderful horse in straightaway riding, but he never gave up an attempt because he could not clearly foretell the outcome. And besides—he gave a grunt of joy. They were heading for rougher ground! The surest hoofs may meet holes.

From a change in the other horse's movements Rob knew that he scented danger. He was still cantering, but there was more up and down motion than gain in distance. Wary steed or wonderful rider? He, just as likely as Rob, was hoping that his pursuer would plunge into a hole or concealed coal pit.

The Royalist felt the danger, too. He accepted the duel with Rob. He had drawn his sword. Rob lugged his heavy saber from its rattling scabbard and held it against his right shoulder. Back-handed strokes were difficult to parry in the saddle, therefore, Rob planned to ride up on the left of his prisoner—for so he considered him already.

Rob stood erect in his stirrups and held his blade high above his head.

"Yield, in the name of the Commonwealth!" he cried.

The other made no sound or sign and Rob brought his heavy weapon down in a wide curve first to his

left and then toward his right to strike the driving left arm of the Royalist. There was a flash of brighter steel and where no weapon had been before the courtier's blade was held out stiff.

Sparks flew as the two swords met. The Royalist could not check Rob's wide swing of the heavy weapon, but he did meet it. Reluctantly Rob's blade missed his shoulder, his elbow, his knee, his horse's shoulder, just grazed his stirrup iron, and came to rest finally against Rob's own boot toe. This man was no common swordsman. Rob felt his amazing strength in the resistance of the slender blade against his heavy saber.

The man dared to laugh full in Rob's discomfiture and made his horse cavort to the right as easily as though he were showing his paces to a crowd of girls.

"Have at you, then!" yelled Rob, raising his saber for another blow while the other watched all his unguarded trunk, neck, and head, and deliberated whether he should dash forward and run Rob through the throat or eye before the unwieldy cavalry sword could be swung down once more. Defense was safer here than offense, so he awaited Rob's onslaught.

The Commonwealth trooper's blood was up. Twice more skill than his had thwarted him. But not this time! He would ride him down, attack him on the flank, and when all his skill had been shown, at last overcome him by sheer weight of horse and rider and fierceness of attack.

The Royalist looked Rob over as he spurred thunderously forward, and with a start raised himself in his saddle and leaned forward. To Rob, that meant his method of meeting his charge. The cry that the Royalist uttered Rob did not hear, for with

a grinding of leather and a clanking of bit-irons his horse's forelegs sank under him into a hole and the steed thudded against the ground. Rob flung his sword aside to save himself, dragged his feet from the stirrups as the shock came, and sprang or was flung to his knees several yards away.

Half blinded by the jolt and his own fury he found his feet again and marked the composed rider.

With a savage cry and a bound Rob threw himself at the horse's side and grabbed the flap of the saddle and the belly-band. A sharp pain warned him that he had been gashed across the knuckles, but he clung in desperation to the rearing horse whose rider tried to fling off this heavy weight. Dragged across the rough ground for yards Rob felt his bleeding fingers loosening. His arms were being wrenched from his shoulders. His feet were hooked by holes and bushes. He measured his length in the grasses.

It was not exhaustion, however, that caused him to rise no further than to his knees and stare blankly after the slowly disappearing Royalist.

"Score two for me, Rob Rennie," the man had called down at him. "Better luck to you the third time you meet Roy Chester!"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

WHAT ROB CAPTURED

At the signal given to him by Rob, Danvers had reined in his horse close to the stiff figure of the aide on the ground. At first the Commonwealth soldier glanced at him carelessly, wondering why Rob should ask him to watch a corpse. A later look made him change his opinion. The fellow's face seemed less gray and ashen. Blood seemed to be making its way under his skin. In a few moments when Danvers, having assured himself that Rob, though off his horse, was still unharmed, looked down again, he could have taken his Bible oath that the fellow had changed his position.

He would bear watching.

There was no doubt of it now. Did the fellow have something he wanted to keep concealed under him? In spite of his contempt for a non-fighter, Danvers appreciated the faithfulness displayed in trying to help your own side, even when an enemy is towering above you on a mass of horse flesh that could crush the life out of you with one descent of his front hoofs. If the fellow were really shamming, he might as well be fully prepared for any sudden

movement. Noisily he drew his heavy sword and let the scabbard rattle against his high boot. The figure on the ground slowly opened one eye and then as Danvers glared fiercely down at it, he winked it once, closed it calmly, grinned winningly up at the stern Roundhead, and rolled over more comfortably on his side.

"You Royalists certainly do take your soldiering easily," Danvers spat out at him. He was beginning to feel a little ridiculous to himself;—he, a hulk of a cavalryman on a huge horse, mounting guard over an unresisting officer's aide who merely stretched himself at his ease below him. There was little sense and less thrill in taking prisoner a poltroon who did not know enough to resist.

Danvers wished that Rob would return and relieve him of his prisoner. There must be profitable looting further on among the officers' quarters.

Rob was stumbling toward him across the uneven field, the dazed stare still in his eyes. Even at a distance he raised a tired arm and pointed at the reclining youth.

"Don't let him get away," he called.

"He's safe," Danvers answered. "Wind knocked out of him."

The fellow opened the one visible eye again, but his grin was not so confident. There were two Roundheads to reckon with. Prisoner of war he must be, he supposed.

Rob approached.

"He has a leather case?" he asked Danvers.

"I didn't see any."

"Then he cast it aside."

"No. So that's it! That's why he rolled over just now. Hiding it under him."

Rob stirred the aide with his foot.

"Up," he ordered.

The upper eye opened, measured Rob calmly, accepted the unequalness of the odds against him, and the man slowly rose on his side, his knees, and finally to his feet.

"Hand over the case," Rob commanded, taking possession of the weather-stained cylinder, and passing it up to Danvers.

"Papers and dispatches," he remarked. "Likely to be valuable. What shall we do with this fellow?"

For answer Rob drew his long-bladed clasp knife and opened it.

The prisoner's eyes started from his head.

"Don't stab me," he yelled. "Quarter! I ask for quarter! I surrender!"

"Surrender!" Danvers burst out indignantly. "Quarter's not for the likes of you but for fighters."

"Just to be sure you don't break for freedom," Rob explained, carefully beginning to cut every button from his clothes and to sever every tab that held his breeches up.

"He won't be able to run," he explained to Danvers. "He's safe with—"

Rob suddenly stopped. A rustle of paper had reached his ears. He felt the coat again. There was no mistaking it. Papers between the outer cloth and the lining! Yet he could find no slit, no opening.

"Rips the seam and sews it up again, likely," Danvers volunteered at Rob's perplexity.

"Must be that. I can do a little ripping myself."

Rob's knife whirred along the inside of the coat.

"Private papers only," the man muttered, relieved at the use to which the murderous weapon was being put. "Nothing but letters."

"Maybe all the more important and valuable for us," Rob reminded him coolly, taking possession of all he could find there, and tapping him gently all over to listen for other helpful rustles of paper.

Danvers was pink with pleasure at the unexpected value of their capture.

"I'll have him searched again in camp." Danvers wished to discover something.

"Do it thoroughly. Don't overlook any part of his boots," Rob added in a matter-of-fact tone. "Don't fail to split apart the layers of the soles and heels."

Rob bent his eyes severely upon their willing prisoner.

"If he puts anything into his mouth, he'll be trying to destroy a paper. Run him through at once."

"His hands will be wanted all the time to hold his

small clothes up. I'm going to keep him moving at a good round pace."

"If these are nothing more than harmless letters," Rob said, "we'll give them all back to you."

He had been rapidly breaking the seals of those that bore wax and hastily casting his eyes over the writing.

"I must see if I can bring my horse in. Too good a nag to lose."

Rob stopped short as though a dirk had struck him between the shoulders. Into Danver's clutch he pressed a batch of letters including some he had not yet examined.

"That's all," he blurted out abruptly and turned away toward his horse that by now had scrambled to its feet and had approached slowly, breaking its limping pace by long waits and whinnying toward Rob.

Rob took only a few steps and then glanced back to see if Danvers and his prisoner had moved on. Satisfied that they had started but fearful lest his comrade turn to watch him, Rob hurried on till he had put his horse between them. There, shielded by his steed, but without so much as giving the grateful animal a pat of encouragement, Rob opened his clenched fist and looked again at the letter that had startled him.

For his rapidly moving eyes had caught the three words, "Your pretty Prue."

Could it be possible that Roy Chester held the secret of Prue's disappearance? Yet he had indig-

nantly denied that he had carried her off and denied so well that Rob had believed him. Twice the fortunes of war had put Roy Chester in his power and twice he had made his escape, each time by recklessness and skill that in spite of his inborn hatred of all Royalists made Rob admire him.

This letter might be one written to Roy Chester. In that case he had lied—as any Royalist would—to deceive his sweetheart's brother. But it might be a letter Chester had written to someone else. How could that be? Men who wrote letters sent them off; they did not keep them on their persons or give them to their servants. Yet several that Rob had taken from the aide had borne unbroken seals. They might

be letters from Roy Chester to other persons, but not yet started on their way. The surprise of the battle that day would explain many strange things. The Royalists had been led into a false sense of security.

Rob must not condemn so gallant a man, even a Royalist, on such flimsy grounds.

All these thoughts flashed through Rob's brain in vivid and rapid confusion as he hurried to make a screen of his waiting horse. His hands trembled and he had to seize the stirrup strap to steady himself.

He turned to the end of the letter.

> "Always faithfully, even in this tossed England, though I had a thousand times rather be in Spain.
>
> "Roy Donald Chester."

So "Your pretty Prue" meant some other man's Prue! Could Rob be certain that this Prue was his own sister? He would find that out quickly enough.

To whom was this letter to be sent? He found the superscription at the top of the page.

"Sir Mortimer Whitford, the Lodge, Newport, Wight."

If this was the man with whom Prue had left, it was no wonder they had lost all trace of her and received no news. The Isle of Wight! Why, that was clear across the length of England, far away off the coast to the south. Englishmen who lived down there were of a different breed, Rob had been taught

to believe;—almost as bad as foreigners. No wonder Prue had been dazzled by a fine gentleman from a land so far off. Rob had the same instinct as well; the desire to see the unknown. Once or twice he had praised those brave souls who deserted their native countries for the marvelous lands of the Colonies and Plantations in America.

Could he get to the Isle of Wight?

He was thinking more steadily now and gave his thigh a slap when he reminded himself that two names had set his thoughts wandering to unknown Spain and the more distant New World. And as yet he had not read Roy Chester's letter to Sir Mortimer Whitford.

He would at once.

"Comrade of my vanishing youth," it began.

"Stuff and nonsense. Chester's only out of his teens. His 'vanishing youth' indeed.

"Comrade of my vanishing youth. This will announce to you the return of peace, for within this week we must meet the silly Roundheads, and then nothing can save them from falling into our hands and being spared from slaughter by the mildness of our King."

Rob stopped and smiled bitterly, casting his eyes around the field that put an end to that silly Royalist delusion and mockery.

"So I, no longer needed here, may return to the land I desire. But even in peace—and your brother's

sudden end means glorious peace for you in addition to the title and estates—let me warn you to beware. Your pretty Prue—"

It was at this fold in the page that Rob's eye had first caught these words.

"Your pretty Prue may bring you trouble and annoyance. He is a Roundhead devil with all the marks of their terrible clan. By which I mean that he can ride and fight rough and tumble, and has no delicacy about disturbing gentlemen in their delicious morning slumber. But like as not I told you of that adventure which cost the life of our good general and gave me a ducking and cold to the bone. But I ramble on beyond reason."

"You do," commented Rob.

"But I must repeat my warning now that with the defeat of the Roundheads within a few days the young brother of your pretty mistress will seek you out. Your change of name—with your new title—may shield you. My one regret is that I shall not be by when Rob Rennie meets you, for I am, as you know always faithfully yours, even in this tossed England, though I had a thousand times rather be in Spain."

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE LODGE AT NIGHT

WHILE both armies were at a stand after the rout of the Royalists at Naseby, the King performed an action that threw his followers and supporters into the utmost confusion. These courtiers and soldiers would have prevented all news of it from reaching the Parliament in Westminster and all the divisions of the Commonwealth Army in the country and towns, but the report was so petrifying that it spread everywhere.

Commonwealth men agreed with their Royalist enemies in the way they received it;—they were so astounded that they knew not what to do and therefore did nothing.

The King, without warning anyone, had left his court at Oxford one morning at daybreak, and taking with him only two servants had disappeared completely.

Why had he left? No one knew.

Where had he gone? No one knew.

Had he crossed to Ireland? No one knew.

To France? No one knew.

Was he still alive? No one knew.

At this time it was no difficult thing for Rob to obtain a furlough—as he explained it, for family affairs—and hurry to the south to reach the Isle of Wight. If Sir Mortimer had chosen this place for himself, it must be that the Isle of Wight was safe in Royalist hands.

Was Prue still with him?

Was his journey to be in vain, after all?

Would it be possible to cross from the mainland without giving a clear account of himself? He would look about in Southampton first. A seaport town should provide some means for a seafaring man.

As Rob approached the southern seacoast he changed his appearance as much as possible from that of a soldier to that of a sailor. Nearly every city through which he passed had some tailor—and the tailors were famous as Commonwealth men—who would make over or take in exchange some portion of his garb. Once in Southampton he sought out an inn frequented by Flemish and Dutch seamen and spent hours lolling along the water front. Large boats would not serve him; they cleared from Southampton for the mainland of France, Flanders, and Holland. He would have to find some small craft that either was going to touch at Newport or could be induced to touch the Isle of Wight.

Two days were spent in seeking and questioning. On the third, late in the afternoon, far from the populous middle of the waterfront, Rob found a

small crazy-looking fishing boat being baled of enough water to sink her. Her small crew of wizened Breton fishermen looked as though they would do anything for a few coppers. With them Rob soon made a bargain to land him somewhere—anywhere—on the Isle of Wight. They would not promise to make the harbor of Newport, and looking with an expert eye at their patched and dark painted sails, Rob felt they were wise in that. He insisted, however, that there must be a protected cove or low beach in which he could be put ashore.

Rob piled some cordage on the dryest spot near the stern and threw himself down out of range of any curious boatmen and dropped asleep. The lap, lap of the water when the *Marie* turned into the channel wakened him. Two of the men were still baling, the oldest held the tiller. Rob pushed the old fellow aside in spite of all his protests, told him to help bale to keep the tub afloat, and grasped the tiller himself. The old Frenchman watched him for only a second, saw that Rob knew something about boats, and then totally disregarding Rob's fear of the boat's leaking, busied himself with cutting long fish into short pieces for bait.

"If he's that certain this hulk will float," Rob said to himself, "I shall reach Wight safely."

Running as close as he dared to a sandy shore, Rob called the old steersman to stand by, and then pushing the tiller far over, as the stern swung round,

he let himself over the end and dropped in three feet of water as the *Marie* turned her nose toward the open sea.

That night Rob slept on the lee side of a tall hedge. Next day a few questions led him to a cobbler who, unsuspected, passed information on to Commonwealth supporters and often was able to send important news to the Parliament itself. After Rob had proved his loyalty to his cause the old man was ready enough to direct him to the Lodge, for of all the estates about, only one was accorded that name for its gate house. Whenever a customer approached, Rob would saunter away from the small shop, but all day he returned at intervals. The cobbler was most entranced by Rob's tale of his battles.

When the sun had set, Rob started from the town in the direction of the manor house where the Lodge was. He had learned that the estate was a Royalist center; in fact, all of Wight was a stronghold for the King. As darkness gathered about him, Rob was plodding along a country road between two high stone walls above which towered majestic old trees. The cobbler had described the estate and its surroundings as accurately as he could, and had furnished Rob with the one thing he had requested. In his belt Rob fingered the short knife the cobbler had sharpened for him. Wound round his body was the coil of strong slender rope Rob had bought at a ship chandler's shop.

As he paced slowly along, choosing the soft dirt at the side of the road for his path to make no sound Rob recalled another peaceful country walk of his—the one that had led him to the gates of Hull. All the time he was moving, his eye was following the distinct line of the top of the wall against the darker foliage or the lighter sky. Judging every irregularity he slackened his pace or resumed his steady advance.

He could have shouted aloud for joy. Projecting a foot over the edge of the wall above the road was the short stump of a limb broken off by the wind or lightning. It was distinctly black against the dark gray sky. Turning from the road and pushing through the tall grasses and bushes, Rob leaned beside the base of the stones and quietly and slowly uncoiled the rope from his body.

He had made a slip knot in one end. Now, if ever, he needed the skill his training on boats had given him. It had been an easy task as they slipped past a wharf or jetty to cast a cable over one of the projecting piles and draw the boat alongside. But could he, so far below, loop his noose over that short knob of a tree limb?

Even the night was favoring him. The breeze that had died with the setting sun was rising. The swishing bushes and rustling leaves would soon cover the hiss of the rope as it uncoiled.

Returning to the edge of the roadway, he aimed

and cast. The rope uncoiled to a straight line above him, but failed even to touch any part of the tree. It fell flat against the road with the crack of a whip, raising a long line of dust. Holding his breath, he waited before he recoiled the rope.

He moved away from his stand directly below the broken limb and saw at once that he could judge the distance better. The rope struck the limb but rebounded. Thrice again he failed. Then he rested. Moving farther from the wall he tried again with better results, but when the noose caught, the slightest tug pulled it loose and the tiring attempts began all over again. Finally the rope held. He pulled. It was firm. He bore all his weight upon it. The branch creaked ever so little, but the rope was fast. Hand over hand, feet against the wall, as a sailor walks up a mast, Rob mounted and straddled the wall. On the other side he descended as noiselessly.

His feet found the grass bordering a walk parallel with the wall. He followed it until, passing a great clump of bushes, he saw before him the gabled roof of the lodge and through one of its ground floor windows the subdued light of a fire or a shaded lamp.

His heart was thumping as it never had before a battle. He forced himself to be calm. Keeping on the turf he drew nearer to the lighted window. One half the tall casement was open. Standing at a distance, Rob could see plainly most of the room. On a long table was a low shaded candle near a pile of

folded papers. Head in hands, reading the sheet spread before him, sat a coatless man, the silk of his delicate shirt irritating Rob as much as his possession of his sister did. Rob could see plainly only the reader's left shoulder and the back of his head. Not so young, evidently, as Rob had expected from the age of Roy Donald Chester.

Rob thought he was standing still, but the view of the room fascinated him, and it was only when he put his hand out to touch the window frame that he realized how close he had drawn.

Without making the slightest sound he put one foot into the room. It met a thick soft rug. Drawing his body after it he stepped completely into the room.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

AGAINST THE WALL

For a long time Rob stood there looking steadfastly at the aristocratic unsuspecting gentleman. If Prue had found him so fascinating Rob could in his own heart see some excuses for her. The long drab years in her stern father's house had prepared the high-strung Prue to commit some act of impulsive folly such as running away with a man above her in station. Rob stiffened at that thought, for the Rennies had as good old English blood as any dwellers in the north country. The man himself should have stopped her; should have saved the neighborhood scandal, the gibes of such curs as Tom Harrison (Rob flushed again at the thought of that cad); should have spared her parents the long tortures of their agony of shame and uncertainty.

With that instinctive sense of family protection the quick-tempered Rob felt all his anger rising against this man, so ignorant of his presence, reading so calmly there in the patch of yellow light.

Perhaps Rob drew a long breath, or perhaps as often occurs in total solitude, there was some sense conveyed to Sir Mortimer of the presence of another person in the room. He raised his eyes slowly, saw

nothing before him, and then, after his gaze had become accustomed to the semi-darkness beyond the candle flame, he turned his eyes slowly toward the open window.

The huge dark outline of Rob's body filled the open casement.

Sir Mortimer dropped his hand to his left side. He muttered a quiet exclamation of disappointment and his eye instinctively cast itself to his discarded sword, halfway across the room toward Rob. When he had thrown off his coat, he had unbuckled his sword.

Rob took two steps to prevent him from springing to the chair and arming himself.

Sir Mortimer did not start violently. He did not jump to his feet, overturning the chair. He did not cry out in astonishment or fear. Was he trying to save someone from the noise of the disturbance? Or was he so completely alone that an outcry would bring no help?

Sir Mortimer noted at once that the intruder carried no weapon. He rose slowly, and still holding by the top of the chair faced the rough-looking figure who had entered his house with no invitation or warning.

"Sir Mortimer Whitford?" Rob asked him in a low voice. If there were servants, let them not be summoned until his work was over. The coolness of the man standing over against him fanned his resentment to fever anger.

"What's that to you?" the host asked, likewise in a low tone.

"It's much to me, as you'll soon learn."

"Out of my house," the other retorted angrily, "or I'll have you whipped like a dog!"

Rob gathered himself to spring. The other took in his posture at once and flung the burning candlestick and shade straight at Rob's head. Rob received the blow on his hand—a stinging burn—but the candle went out as it fell, and Rob felt his knees sweep Sir

Mortimer's sword to the soft rugs on the floor as he darted past the chair on which it lay. It would have been folly for Rob to try to find it; but it would be likely just as hidden from its owner.

Rob's wide-spread arms met the surprised Sir Mortimer. He dodged, he squirmed; but Rob had kept him against the heavy wooden table and now was striving to get his strong fingers on his throat. And he would, too, though this fellow was wiry and slippery. He was near it now, tear as the other would at his fingers.

"What have you done with my sister Prue?" Rob demanded. Then before the other could more than begin to gurgle inarticulate sounds, Rob's fingers clutched his windpipe and began to press.

His antagonist reached for Rob's eyes, and punishing him painfully, forced him to back across the room toward the window. Still Rob clung to the throat of the despoiler of his family honor. Swaying, panting, tugging, pushing, twisting, muttering, the two locked figures moved across the room.

Back toward the center they revolved as Sir Mortimer tried to break from the choking grip. Rob hung on like a barnacle on a ship's bottom, though he was well-nigh spent.

So far both men had seemed to agree that this combat was to be a single, silent one waged between them with no weapons. To Rob it meant punishment, and punishment for him took the form of the sailor's

HIS OPPONENT FELT THE CHANGE AND TOOK ADVANTAGE AT ONCE

method—the righting of wrongs by the use of one's own natural means of physical revenge.

This was growing easier for Rob, for now the heavy table was again behind Sir Mortimer, aiding Rob to master his struggles.

Then in an instant, everything was changed. His prey wrenched backwards; Rob flung himself upon him with the entire weight of his heavy body. As the impact met the long table, over it went with a crash loud enough to wake the dead.

"Curse your noise!" yelled Sir Mortimer, who for just one second could use his voice before he sprang again at Rob.

With Rob it was no longer revenge and punishment; it was salvation and escape. A dozen serving-men might dash in to spoil his venture and turn the odds against him. He soon learned that, exactly as the other aristocrat, with whom he had tried his skill, had knowledge of swords and horses beyond all he had ever dreamed, this Royalist had a knowledge of wrestling that almost outtopped his own reliance on rough-and-tumble advantage of breaks and the use of overwhelming strength and bulk. To his smashing, crushing tactics Rob now added natural outbursts of feeling, though his antagonist remained without attempting a single word. They were in the middle of the disordered room, body against body, trying to gain the hold that would mean ultimate victory.

"You will, will you?" Rob grunted. "Not this time!—Try that again!—There's your foot, is it!—If I get this around your Royalist neck!"

The wide door in the long side of the room was thrown back and there, standing in the opening, was one of the most beautiful women Rob had ever seen. He caught only short glimpses of her now as he panted and strained, but the bright glow of the three candles in the base she held high illuminated her mussed blond hair, her brilliant pink and white skin above the dark blue wrap she had hastily caught up and drawn about her trembling shoulders.

Could that be Prue? How she had changed, then! This glorious lady, so tall, so courageous;—his little sister? Incredible! Yet it must be.

Then he heard her voice and all doubt vanished.

It was Prue!

"My husband!" she called. "Oh, my husband!"

That single word worsted Rob. He had never thought of that word. That word could never be true of a Royalist and a girl of the people.

Rob's grasp relaxed and his arms loosened. His opponent felt the change and took advantage at once. Changing his tactics, he wrenched Rob's shoulder and then with a sudden straightening he flung the youth far from him. Rob crashed to the floor; pushed rugs and chairs aside as he slid along; and came to rest with a dull crack as his head met the wainscoted wall.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE OTHER BLANK PAGE

PRUE's first thought and only one was of her husband. He was merely winded and dishevelled, scratched in a few places, and marked about the throat by his assailant's binding fingers. But his delicate shirt was in shreds, his breeches were slashed. The furniture was in disorder and the rugs pushed up.

She put the candle stand on the righted table and looked Sir Mortimer over while he shook himself to be certain he could use his whole body.

"Let's have a look at this fellow," he said.

To save his arm the fatigue, Prue picked up the candle base and preceded him across the room. The figure was rocking ever so little.

"Not dead then," Sir Mortimer pronounced him before either had taken a good look.

Prue leaned close to the terrifying person who had assaulted her husband. Then she shrieked.

"Rob! Oh, Rob! My brother," she added, turning to her husband.

His face began to show signs of comprehending.

"Oh, Prue! He did ask me about you. I'd forgotten. Then he dashed at me like a wild beast."

"Why should he do that? Oh, Rob, Rob," she tried to rouse him.

"Could he be crazed?" Sir Mortimer asked suspiciously.

"I don't know! I don't think so! Get me a basin of water. We must do something for him."

"He almost did something for me," her husband reminded her woefully to try to relieve the tension of her mind and feelings.

Rob was no slight load, but they thought it better not to run to the servants' quarters to rout them out at that time of night, and Prue was no mere flower of a delicate beauty, so by dragging and carrying they finally got Rob into a truckle-bed on the ground floor.

The mystery, discuss it as Prue and her husband would, grew only the denser until they could get sensible answers from the sleeping Rob. All night long Prue and Sir Mortimer dozed and started awake beside the bed. When, late in the morning, Rob slowly opened his eyes, he recognized his sister at once, but his mind darted back to their childhood to-

gether. It was many minutes before he could fully comprehend the furnishings that surrounded him. His first sight of Sir Mortimer upset for a few minutes again all his sense of fitness.

A cavalryman's appetite required an enormous breakfast, after which Rob wanted to sleep again, but out of politeness to Prue, he tried to keep his eyes open and his wits on her silly questions and observations. Once or twice Rob was disposed to accept the whole adventure as a dream. He would admit that he had been knocked on the head. The Royalists had a favorite habit of doing that to any unwary Roundhead they could strike without risk to themselves. He had been foolish to become separated from his fellow Lobsters. Someone had dealt him a blow. These pains and aches were perfectly natural after a welt on the skull. But the sight of his little sister Prue in sumptuous rooms, dressed like a lady, and radiantly beautiful! That was rather serious. Seeing such visions was almost like being escorted by angels. And Rob did not like to admit that he was done with living yet.

His return to the light of day that same afternoon brought little relief from the pains and stiffness, but he was convinced he was still alive, though the first glimpse of Prue in brilliant yellow made him seize all his wits and hold on to them.

"Listen, Rob, and try to understand me."

He blinked his willingness.

"I'm your Prue, of course. And Sir Mortimer is my husband. No, he's not in the room now, so don't loosen that bandage by screwing your neck around. And I'm happily married. So your idea of revenge or punishment is all wrong, you see."

Rob could simply lie and gaze at her like a big booby. Married! Why hadn't they known this? It changed everything. They had taken for granted that her lover had induced her to go off with him merely because he found her attractive. Then he would cast her off. And what could they do—poor simple people—to help her then, when it would be too late? But her husband! Married to him! Why hadn't they known?

Prue could read every thought that passed through his mind. She blushed with shame that her family should think her such a light-o'-love; then she blanched pale at the agony she must have caused them. But why?

When Rob could form the sounds he began to sputter.

"Why didn't you let us know this?" he finally blurted out at Prue.

"I did."

"Honor bright?"

"Honor bright, Rob. Don't tell me you didn't know."

"Not a word."

"Oh, my poor mother and father," Prue wailed.

Then with that unexpectedness of women, just when Rob had on the tip of his tongue to ask her how she had expected her family to know, she vanished from the room leaving him helpless, with all his anxiety and curiosity totally unsatisfied. Three minutes later she returned with a radiant face leading her husband.

"Why drag him in?" Rob thought resentfully at first.

Prue wiggled a reproving finger at him.

"Get used to it, Rob; Mort's in the family now."

Rob changed his face at once.

"Ask him not to hold any grudges for my grip on his throat."

"If you'll overlook your cracked skull."

"But Prue caused that, not you," Rob corrected him.

"As you say; it's your cranium," Sir Mortimer answered agreeably. "You say you didn't receive Prue's note?"

"Think carefully, Rob," Prue urged.

"A note to father," Rob began slowly.

Prue nodded.

"And one to me in our old stump."

"Yes," Prue encouraged him.

Rob gazed blankly from one to the other.

"Go on," his brother-in-law coaxed.

"But that's all," concluded Rob.

Her husband was about to speak out quickly, but Prue's upheld hand checked him.

"Rob, didn't you see old Gaffer Warren—not once?"

"Of course, I did. Had a long chat with him."

"Now be careful about this. Didn't he give you a note from me?"

Rob shook his head emphatically.

"And I gave it to him for safety!" Prue sighed. "He never failed me before."

"There was something queer about Gaffer when he talked to me," Rob went on recollecting. "I felt that he wanted to tell me something he couldn't get out. We must remember, Prue, old Gaffer Warren's older than he used to be when we were youngsters. He said something—something—about—I have it. Not exactly, perhaps. 'Papers are tricksy things.' Something more. He'd lost papers. Couldn't find where he'd put them. 'Some stole, like as not,' he said. Then he felt that papers always make trouble. 'But people keep on wanting them.' He wound up with that."

"Poor old Gaffer; trying to make up to you, I suppose, for the loss of my letter—only a bit of troubling paper, no doubt, to him."

"Yet all of us would have been spared all these worries about you, Prue."

"Terrible. We thought you were provoked, or your letters might have been lost and these have been troublous times. If they ever stop, we hope to go north to see Mother and Father."

"You must, Prue."

"Will they let me see them?" her husband asked.

"They'll be proud of such a son-in-law," Rob told him.

"I wish my letter had reached you," Prue repeated.

"Do you know where the King is?" Rob suddenly asked Sir Mortimer.

"Not yet. In a few days we shall, I think."

It was Prue who burst into Rob's room a few days later and shouted the astounding information.

"The King has gone to the Scotch Army, Rob."

"He did that, did he?" was his only answer.

"Aren't you glad?" His sister's face was beaming.

"Not at all."

"Doesn't that mean the end of the Civil War? Isn't all the fighting over, then?" She stared at him, wide-eyed.

"Ask your lord and master there." Sir Mortimer had come up behind her. She turned.

"Rob can tell you better than I can," he said.

"That was the worst thing the King could do. This means a Scottish invasion of England as soon as the Scots can get ready. Every fighting man will be needed in the North. I must go."

"No, Rob," protested Prue.

Sir Mortimer's remark was the fitting one.

"I'll lend you a good horse."

"And I'll go by way of London and make Darcy join me," concluded Rob.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

GAFFER SITS IN THE SUN

THE immense buildings and the crowded dwellers of London always made Rob's throat close with wonder and admiration. This time, however, as he rode slowly along the twisting ways of the Strand and Fleet Street he pushed on eastward until he came in full view of the fearsome Tower of London. Castle and fortress earlier, to Rob it was the grim and gory prison in which hundreds of defenders of the people's liberty had languished and been beheaded, or hanged, or drawn and quartered. What would have happened to England had the King and his dissolute courtiers gained possession of that irregular pile of masonry to overawe the rich metropolis of London?

He had to smile at himself when he recalled how powerful, how irresistible the stronghold of Doncaster had seemed to its garrison, and then how weak it had

seemed when all the men had left except Rob and Darcy walled up in a small chamber.

Could the Tower of London ever be captured? Ever be destroyed?

Yet men had escaped from it. He knew the story of several escapes. The Lord Capel had lowered himself over the wall of Windsor Castle into the moat and had started to walk through the water. It had been almost too deep for him and as he sank into the mud and ooze he had almost called to the guards for help and suffered himself to be taken back a prisoner. He dared not swim for fear of attracting attention by the noise. If he had not been an uncommonly tall man he must of a certainty have drowned; but he was six feet three inches and kept his nose above water all the way across the well-filled moat.

"But he couldn't escape from the Tower," said Rob, shaking his head.

In a squalid dark alley, too narrow for his horse to turn round, Rob found Darcy happy with his family.

Yes; he had heard the news of the King's safety with the Scots. All London was ringing with it. Yes; he knew soldiers would be needed. No; the Scots had not yet invaded the northern countries. Why should he go before the fighting began? He was a seasoned soldier. He did not need training. He had kept the field for several years now. Let newer, younger men hold up their end of the duty.

"You'd rather be here than on horseback in the

open country?" Rob asked, sniffing the air unbelievingly.

"Of course. This is my home," Darcy defended his preference.

Rapidly Rob outlined his adventure with his sister and her husband, telling as much as was necessary of the lost message.

"You see," he wound up, "I've got to solve that mystery. If someone plotted against Prue or us I may have some work to do. And I'd like to have someone near me on whom I can trust."

Darcy was on his feet adjusting his belt.

"Why didn't you tell me that in the first place?" he demanded. "Let's go to the nearest recruiting sergeant. He'll give me an order for a new horse."

They found that recruiting was active, and that Darcy with all his bluster of past record and service with the Lobsters could not get a mount for two days, though the sergeant kindly suggested that the North Countree had lots of horses, if he would only travel there to get one.

That Darcy, as a seasoned cavalryman, flatly refused to do.

"Will you wait for me?" he asked Rob.

"I'll go home first. Listen. You like cities. York is near the Scottish Army, and not far from my town. Three days' good riding from here to York. Six days from now in York at the Three Ships Inn. I know the place. Don't fail me."

Rob found Gaffer Warren with legs spread out before him, with his back upright against a stone wall, basking in the direct rays of the afternoon sun.

Rob had been warned by his mother and father that the old man was changed. He had aged rapidly in the past year. The troubles of the kingdom had affected him but little at first; only when he saw the direct results on the lands and families of the people he had always known was the impression on him a bitter one.

"Prue's husband ought to protect all of us from his stealing Royalist friends!" her mother complained.

"Perhaps he will," Rob assured her.

"I don't doubt our men do things almost as bad," her husband spoke in fairness.

Rob felt that they had better get back to Gaffer Warren before he had to admit what sights he had witnessed.

"One or two raiders have treated him badly," his mother continued. "Even struck him and bound him. It's made him silly."

"Now, Mother! Not so fast," was the stern reproof. "Mayhap he's only shamming to save himself trouble. That wouldn't be so silly."

"I had that feeling when I talked to him last time," Rob said. "He made me believe he knew more than he was letting on."

"You do your best with him," was his father's last word of advice.

ROB FOUND GAFFER WARREN WITH HIS LEGS SPREAD OUT BEFORE HIM

As Rob now approached the old fellow he recalled all that had been told him. He was shocked beyond anticipation at the sunken, weakened little frame hardly alive in the dazzling light. He was afraid to disturb him and dropped to the grass in range of his eyes when he should open them.

Suddenly Rob broke into a hearty guffaw of laughter. He had seen one eye cautiously open, fall upon him, then snap shut.

"Here, Gaffer, you're awake. Stop shamming with me."

The mouth, hidden by nose and chin, opened to a long narrow slit, and cackled like a sick crow.

"Caught me. Thought you'd gone away."

"Sit here all day till you speak to me."

The beady little eyes were open, though one was shaded by the heavy lid that drooped half way across the eyeball.

"Soldier, eh?" the thin voice squeaked.

"Yes. Why?"

"King or Commonwealth?"

"Don't you remember? Don't you know me? Commonwealth. I'm Rob Rennie."

"Guess you could catch a chicken's quick as catch a Royalist. I'm safe. No live stock. No funds. We'll all be wealthy when the King's captured and executed, though."

"I'm not after chickens or money."

"Sure you're a soldier, then? Makes me doubt you."

"Don't you remember Rennie—Prue and Rob Rennie?"

The eyes looked more closely.

"Rob? How's Prue? Where is she?" the old man asked eagerly.

As Rob spoke at length the old man's queries became more and more intelligent, more and more pointed.

"Was Father right?" thought Rob. "Is he just keen enough to pretend his wits are failing? But why with me?"

Rob could see that the more distant the event, the better Gaffer remembered it. Of Prue as a little girl he spoke at length. Of the Prue that Rob tried to describe, he comprehended only a little. Of Rob as a youngster, he recalled all the familiar escapades. Of Rob the saber-brandishing and hard-riding horseman he seemed to know nothing.

Over and over again, slowly and slowly, Rob led up to Prue's departure, only to be met by blank lack of understanding or hearing when he tried to make Gaffer talk about his last interview with her. The flickering flame of his mind seemed to burn lower and lower, then go out entirely.

Only on the mention of papers did Gaffer repeat his opinion to Rob.

"Papers. Dangerous things. Lost many of them.

Never safe to write papers. King made mistake. Lawyers use papers."

Rob thought he saw a flash of resentment surge up in Gaffer's better eye, but it was so transitory that he could not be sure. He made a false move in his next remark.

"Prue gave you a paper for us, didn't she? What became of it?"

"Prue was always doing little things to me," and then the rambling about some little kindness of her girlhood was resumed.

When that long-winded account was ended, Rob simply sat still and plucked grasses and watched the shadows lengthening across the landscape. Gaffer's deep, regular breathing became merged in the sounds of the country, and Rob's thoughts wandered back to Prue and Sir Mortimer in the south of England.

The sound of old Gaffer's mutterings drew Rob back slowly. The old man's eyes were closed again. He seemed to be mumbling to himself in his dreams. Rob felt it was not right to listen. But if the sly old fellow were only pretending? In spite of himself, he tried to make out the words.

"Lawyers take papers.—Steal them.—Only one boy here ever stole from me.—Afraid of lawyers.—Thought he cared for Prue."

The sound of his sister's name made Rob drag himself silently along the grass to be nearer. He lost several words formed with no sound by the lips.

"Would have killed me."

What? Who would have killed this harmless old villager?

"No more to him than he was used to."

Rob tortured his brain. There had been—at least before the war—no neighbor of theirs who delighted in slaughter.

"Stole my paper.—Warned me.—Keep silent."

The mumbling lapsed into meaningless sounds.

"No more than the cattle he helped slaughter."

Rob rose to his knees and seized Gaffer Warren's shoulder in a grip of steel. He shook him roughly.

"You're hurting me!" the old man cried, quite in his old direct manner.

"Who stole Prue's letter from you?" Rob held his face close to the old man's.

"Don't tell me I've been muttering out loud," the old fellow whimpered.

Was he giving Rob a clew?

Slaughter? Lawyer? Cattle? Liked Prue? Threats?

"Tell me who took that letter!" Rob demanded, still with his hand on Gaffer's shoulder.

The look of intelligence began to fade slowly from his eyes. Rob shook him again—not roughly.

"Tell me," he repeated slowly, to penetrate the growing dimness. "Did Tom Harrison take Prue's letter from you?"

Back to the eyes surged the gleam of intelligence;

back into the face rushed the look of determination; into the sunken frame ran the heat of anger; but the galvanized hands clutched at Rob; and the clear voice called in a frightened, pleading tone:

"Don't say I told you! I never told you! I never said that!"

Rob was on his feet.

"No. You didn't tell me. Don't you fear, Gaffer."

With that he strode rapidly away.

Over the old man's face stole an expression of perfect content. No one saw him, but his good eye winked in satisfaction and his wizened old windpipe cackled a few notes of congratulation as he settled himself once more to enjoy the warming sun.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

FAIR CITY OF YORK

When Rob reached York and made his way along the water front to the Three Ships Inn he found a very woebegone and disconsolate Darcy. The little Londoner admitted that York was a splendid city. Yes, the inn was comfortable. No, he had not gone about much. Yes, he had stayed quietly in the hostelry. Yes; he would be glad to ride on and join the army.

"But why so down in the mouth?" Rob asked in bewilderment.

"I can't understand what these people are talking about. Never heard such language," the little fellow voiced his bitter complaint.

Rob laughed until the room shook.

"Oh, I never thought of that, Darcy. That's right, these men are mostly sailor folk."

"Even the others speak an outlandish jargon."

"That's only the Yorkshire tongue, Darcy. If you had talked to them, they could have understood you. They can speak the same language you do."

"Why don't they, then?" muttered Darcy, determined still to be displeased with Yorkshire.

"Have you been with Commonwealth men?"

Darcy shook his head.

"Have you talked with the recruiting sergeants here?"

"Talked with no one," Darcy wound up the conversation huffily. "Stayed here and waited for you."

Rob saw that the little Londoner was at the edge of his nervous endurance. Something to do at once, to occupy his mind would be a relief.

"We have to hunt a man I must see," Rob told him.

Darcy leaned forward until his furrowed face was close to Rob's. He sank his voice to a whisper.

"How do we start?" he asked.

"A Commonwealth recruiting officer first."

Darcy sprang to his feet.

"Let's be off."

The recruiting sergeant easily directed them to an attorney who helped manage Cromwell's affairs in York.

Rob's information was slight, but the quiet lawyer had his body-servant called in. This youth passed on to the clerks and runners in the office the question asked by Rob so that in less than half an hour a messenger had been found who had delivered papers to a fellow attorney in whose office there was an assistant whose name he thought was Harrison—at any rate, a young man who came from some district to York to work in a lawyer's household.

That was sufficient for Rob. Should some one go

with him to point out the way? No; Rob knew York rather well. Did he need any legal assistance? No. This was merely a matter between men who had known each other in the same village.

"Fact is," interrupted Darcy, whose restored confidence felt slighted at being disregarded in all this discussion, "we'd rather not have any lawyers messing about with us. I mean—" he added lamely.

"Don't try to explain what you mean," Rob took the speech from him. "You've said enough. As a matter of fact," he turned to the small group who stood not knowing whether to laugh at Darcy or to resent his remark, "I have to see this fellow myself. Thanks, all the same."

When they regained the street, he turned to Darcy.

"Darcy, Darcy! If this fighting stops, what will happen to you? That tongue of yours! What will you do for a living?"

"Same as before," the other spoke up pertly. "In London, we always speak our minds out straight. Why not? I'll go back to selling fruit. People will always have to eat."

Threading their way across half the busy city they came at last upon the short street to which they had been directed. The houses were tall and projecting so that the fronts of the ground floors were in almost constant shadow. Serving as a short cut between two main thoroughfares, this narrow way was filled with a constant low buzz of passing feet and carts,

pierced by the calls of acquaintances and the cries of drovers and drivers.

Half way down one side in a recessed building only two rooms deep they spied the dulled sign of the Notary and Scrivener. They passed it once, examining it closely.

Rob directed Darcy to mount the two stone steps and loiter along the short hall, keeping his eyes open. If anyone regarded him too curiously he could say he was trying to find Smithson, the bookseller, whose shop was hidden in a basement a few houses farther on.

"Look sharp," Rob warned him as they parted.

Rob stopped before a harness-maker's window until Darcy rejoined him. They walked on.

"Front room, main office. Three men there talking. Standing. Coming out, I think. Rear room, much lighter. One man facing door at desk, writing."

"Then let's stand here and watch," ordered Rob.

Darcy's prediction was correct. In a few minutes they saw the three men emerge from the front office and come into the street.

"See," said Darcy, under his breath. "Going a distance. All of them are putting their gloves on."

It was true. Rob's eyes sparkled.

"You watch in the hall," he said.

"But you have no sword," Darcy cried.

"Left it behind on purpose. Not a soldier today."

"Mine will be ready for you."

"Follow me in," said Rob, and together they made their way across the street and up the steps. Then Darcy dropped behind and Rob strode along the corridor and turned in at the second door.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

IN THE SMALL ROOM

QUITE early in his apprenticeship Tom Harrison had heard that the first English poet had correctly described a good lawyer by writing, "He always seemed busier than he was."

The rule had seemed such a good one to Tom that he had adopted it as his own rule of conduct, and whenever he was left alone in the offices—as now—he acted according to it. Callers always came upon him buried in a weighty volume, or running his nose along the crabbed writing of a parchment, or slowly making curves and flourishes with his own quill. He made them wait until they tried to attract his attention, usually by coughing. So on this eventful morning he did not even raise his eyes to meet the visitor whose footfalls indicated that he was large,

and therefore Tom Harrison hoped, of grave importance.

The man could be as patient as Tom himself. The scribbler stole a glance at the stranger's feet and legs. Strongly shod and garbed, but quiet. Hardly a Cavalier. But one could not be certain in these times, and Tom's master had warned him that clothes less and less marked a man's position in the world. Worse than that, no one knew which of the two factions would retain control of England. The Royalists had been unfortunate, as he pleasantly put it. It would be a source of protection to their business to have many strong clients among the victorious Roundheads. Now, with the King's flight and presence among the Scots, there would be turmoils in these northern shires. Properties would be changing owners. They must look sharp to secure their share of the legal formalities.

"So treat every man alike until you learn what he comes for."

The stranger had as much patience as Tom, but he had approached nearer to Tom's right elbow than most callers dared. He stopped at the corner of the desk. Tom raised his eyes to the stranger's face. His quill made a blot, but he took no notice of it. Overmastering a desire to slip from his stool and put it between them, he forced a smile.

"Rob Rennie, as I'm alive!" he greeted him.

"As you're alive is well put," answered Rob, and

Tom noticed that there was no smile in the greeting.

"Up from the South? In from the Army?" Tom went on. A lawyer must put a visitor at his ease and above all things must be at his ease himself.

"Up from the South. In from the Army," Rob repeated. "And straight from talking to Prue," he added.

"Good," Tom exclaimed. "I hope she's very happy."

"Much she cares about your hopes." Rob was feeling his temper rise, but he took a long breath and gulped.

"Then I suppose you came to see me just as an old friend." Tom was bound he would remain agreeable.

"Old friend nothing!" Rob raised his voice in anger at the effrontery of the whipper-snapper.

"Then I'm sure I can't guess your reason for coming," and Tom spread out his hands with what he intended to be a winning smile.

To Rob it looked like an insulting grin. He took a step nearer.

"Lie to your regular customers, Tom Harrison."

Tom waved the accusation away airily, preferring to accept it as a pleasantry.

"Give me the letter that Prue wrote to my father and mother."

Tom slid from the stool.

"You don't know what you're talking about. I don't know what you're talking about."

"Yes, you do."

"Prue never gave me a letter to her parents."

"I know she didn't."

"Then how can I have any letter of hers?" Tom concluded triumphantly.

"Because you stole it from Gaffer Warren!"

The only movement Tom made was to toss his quill to the desk. Watching him as narrowly as he could, Rob saw no change in the fellow's expression or pose.

"That's a likely story!" he remarked. "How can you prove it?"

"Gaffer Warren himself let it out," Rob was convincing to himself.

"An old half-cracked idiot?" Tom could almost laugh aloud in Rob's face. This was what it meant to cross-examine a witness in court. It was excellent practice.

"Come," retorted Rob, "I don't want to choke your white-livered body unless I have to. But that's how I'm going to force you to give me that letter."

"You don't dare," Tom stared squarely into Rob's eyes. "The noise—people are all about."

"I'll see that you don't scream much. Hear that noise in the street? No one will hear any squeak you make."

Tom examined Rob from head to foot. He could see no weapon.

"Someone will come in," he reminded Rob.

"Don't trust to that," Rob spoke more calmly. "I'll be warned from the hall."

For the first time Tom's countenance changed.

"Not Prue? Not Gaffer?" he cried out.

"Let him think so!" Rob sang to himself. Then aloud: "If we wait until your master comes back, what chance have you against the proofs?"

Tom was visibly confused.

Rob pushed the stool aside and raised his hands as if to seize Tom by the throat. There was a vast difference between this Rob, seasoned and toughened by months of soldiering, and the youth whom Tom had faced in fight before. Tom's copyist hands tried in vain to turn aside the powerful arms of his accuser. Rob's fingers closed on Tom's throat just as the latter blurted out.

"I haven't the letter here."

"Then you have it!" exclaimed Rob, tightening his grip. He was astonished at the little resistance Tom made. It elated him with a sense of his own strength. He began to shake the twisting quill-pusher. Tom's eyes rolled and his face grew red.

"Get me that letter," Rob kept on repeating while Tom's pale fingers tore at his hands and wrists.

"Shall I have to strangle him into unconscious-

ness," thought Rob, "and then ransack his desk? I'll do it, if I have to."

He leaned his face close to Tom's and told him what he intended to do, only he said "to death" instead of "into unconsciousness." Rob had no way of telling whether Tom's crazy motions with his eyes and hands were trying to give him some message or whether they were due to his sufferings. He steeled himself against any feelings of sympathy by thinking of all the agony his father and mother had endured. When he saw plainly that Tom was too limp to make any resistance, he loosened his hold, and propped the gasping fellow up against his desk.

"Now, the letter," he commanded.

Tom gasped and shook and fluttered his hands for a few seconds.

"Been trying to tell you to stop," he stammered. "Will you let me alone if I give it to you?"

"Absolutely alone." He saw Tom's eyes glint. "Unless you try some other villainous trick against me."

Tom coughed to regain his breath. Rob's hands were still not far from his throat. Tom turned the upper part of his body, drew open a small drawer, ran his slim fingers down the folds of several papers, appeared to recognize one by the size or kind of paper, drew it out, and dropped it on the desk within Rob's reach.

"I knew it!" Rob cried as he fixed his eyes on it. "The other page from father's book!"

Intently seizing it and looking within its folds to be sure that he had Prue's own letter, he did not notice that Tom did not push in again the drawer from which he had taken the paper.

Rob turned away.

"Well, Tom Harrison," he said calmly, stepping around the corner of the desk, "I guess we're quits."

Tom's right hand had dropped again into the open drawer. When he drew it forth it held something flat against the wrist. Quickly he took two steps after the departing Rob and raised his right arm.

"Not yet," was all he said as he lunged with all the strength and weight of his body.

The movements and his words warned Rob to spring aside, but the long slender dagger tore a gash in the fleshy part of his left upper arm. Tom gathered himself for another spring, but in that instant the situation changed entirely.

Darcy had followed with his ear from the passageway every sound within the room. He had heard the drawer pulled open. He had waited in vain for the corresponding scratching noise of its being closed. He thought—of this he could not be certain—he heard a hand against the inside of the drawer; there was a slight hollow sound as from the inside of a box. At any rate, when he knew Rob was turning away toward the door, Darcy approached the open-

THE MOVEMENTS AND HIS WORDS WARNED ROB TO SPRING ASIDE

ing from the other side. When he heard Tom spring and cry out, "Not yet," Darcy could almost have exclaimed, "I told you so!"

Before Tom could recover his balance, Darcy had glided through the doorway and forced his thin sword into Rob's right hand and retreated to his watching post again.

The suddenness of Darcy's appearance and vanishing, the arming of the enraged Rennie, made Tom's eyes bulge as much as they had when Rob was compressing his windpipe. Rob, by a great effort, forced his wild infuriation down. Then as calmly as Tom's father looked over a calf before he stuck him, Rob chose the place in his enemy's chest, and ran the sword clear through him.

Tom swayed for a second only, but Rob had time to pull the stool aside, so that the falling body would not send it crashing to the floor. As the limp figure stiffened, Rob bent down and pulling out Tom's neck cloth wiped the blade of Darcy's keen sword on it.

In the passageway he detained Darcy for a time while they listened for any sounds of persons attracted by the noises.

The house was as silent as a graveyard, while outside the sounds of the street grew louder.

As calmly as if they were leaving after a friendly call, Rob and Darcy descended to the pavement. Then they were conscious of a change in the life of the street.

Carters were calling to one another. Total strangers were stopping one another and repeating the astounding news. Messengers were spurring through the crowded short street.

It was some time before Rob and Darcy learned clearly what was speeding throughout York and thence like wildfire across England.

"The Scottish Army has given the King up! The King is a prisoner in the Commonwealth Army! The King has been captured!"

Rob and Darcy withdrew from an awed and excited group and stared in silence at each other.

"The Scots gave the King up!" said Darcy in an awed tone.

"He's a prisoner in the Commonwealth Army!" cried Rob joyously.

"Then our work's over," Darcy added sadly.

"Yes. What shall we do now?" asked Rob.

"I'll go back to selling vegetables in London," and with that prospect Darcy's spirit rose.

"And I'll go to sea again," concluded Rob.

Then, each thinking of the things he would next do, they silently trudged along the excited streets of York.

THE END

DISCARD

DISCARD